



# EpubPress

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## 256. Suarez

Fran disarmed the two executives she captured before sitting them down so she could interrogate them.

Her goal was of course to get them to divulge the Water Dragon Warship's secrets.

"How to control dragon?"

"N-No idea."

"Nn?"

"Giiiiiiiiii!"

One of the execs tried to play dumb, to which Fran reacted by mercilessly stabbing me into his thigh.

"How to control dragon?"

"T-The only ones that can tell you that'll be the boss and the guys right under him!"

"W-We're telling the truth! We're just regular pirates that happened to get raised up through the ranks! They wouldn't tell the likes of us anything!"

"Tell all known information. Even if insignificant."

"I-I'll tell you everything I know, so please, pull your sword out of my leg!"

"Nn."

The pirate that agreed to talk began wailing in a mix of pain and fear as she removed me from his thigh.

His companion, the mage, paled. He realized that he would soon suffer the same fate as his buddy should he refuse to talk. To that end, the small framed caster immediately began spouting off everything he knew, and even went as far as to elaborate on things without us needing to ask.

Though he really didn't know too many details, he was at least capable of confirming that the dragon simply seemed to obey orders; it wasn't being controlled through some sort of large scale magic item. That said, it would only really ever listen to the prince, the guy the pirates referred to as their boss.

Asking them about exactly how the prince was controlling the dragon failed to lead to any results. They didn't even know whether it just recognized him as someone it should listen to, or if it was being manipulated through some other means. In other words, smaller scaled items, skills, and spells were all possibilities we still had to consider.

The most useful thing we got them to do was tell us a bit about the prince. His name was Suarez Sheedran, and could best be described as a brown-skinned hulk of a man with silver-blond hair adorning his head. Suarez was well versed in combat; the average adventurer supposedly wouldn't be able to match him. His main weapon was a massive battleaxe, one he was likely to be carrying around right this moment. Capturing him sounded like it was going to be much easier said than done.

Of course, we also managed to get them to talk about the magical device they were using to strengthen the dragon. Apparently it was quite large, and near the ship's rear, but as the part of the ship holding it was cut off from the rest, we wouldn't be able to find it if we just walked around.

Annoyingly enough, neither of the two we captured knew how to get into the cut off section. In fact, they were both oblivious to its precise location. This, of course, stemmed from the fact that the prince didn't trust them. They, unlike many other executives, hadn't started off as his followers. They were instead just the former top brass of the pirate brigades that used to occupy the area prior to the prince's arrival. Though he did trust them enough to allow them to keep their positions, the prince basically never let them in on anything too important.

"W-We've told you everything you asked for!"

"S-So please, don't kill us...!"

"Got it."

"T-Thank you so mguraaaagh!"

Fran kicked the mage right in the face. The sheer force of the strike sent him spiraling off the ship's deck.

"D-Didn't you say you wouldn't kill us if w-we told you what you wanted!?"

The spearman screamed indignantly as he watched his friend plunge into the sea.

"Didn't kill. Just dumped in sea because in the way."

"W-What the fuck is that suppraaaaghghhhh!"

She wasn't wrong. Fran hadn't actually killed either of the two men. Instead, she'd just knocked them overboard while also depriving them of their consciousness. Though it was rather likely that they'd die, they could still live if they were lucky, so it would be more accurate to chalk their deaths up to their own inability wake as opposed to attributing them to her. Besides, they were pirates, *professional* seafaring pests. As far as I was concerned, they were sure to survive.

"Damn Teach, you're totally merciless!"

"I really love that part of her."

"It looks like we should take after her example and start doing stuff like that too."

Fran's apprentices threw in a few comments as they watched the second man follow the first into the sea. The first two, Miguel and Naria, seemed impressed, whereas the third, Liddick, began making note of her behaviour. Realizing that they'd been watching led me to contemplate whether or not they would benefit from imitating her merciless tendencies. My first instinct was to refute the thought, but then I considered the possibility that they might one day get stabbed in the back and die because they sympathized with a foe. From that, I determined that Fran's approach would probably be best for them in the long run. *Probably.*

[A-Anyway, why don't we go hunt Suarez down?]

"Nn."

We informed all the other adventurers still on the ship's deck about Suarez so

we could have them help us look for him. We hadn't been able to talk to Mordred's party directly, as they'd already started invading the ship's interior, but we attempted to make up for it by asking everyone else to relay the information if they happened to see him.

I had no idea exactly how strong Suarez was, but there was a chance that, Fran aside, Mordred's party would be the only ones capable of dealing with him.

"Urushi, search too."

"Woof!"

All the Algieba's sailors already knew that Urushi was Fran's familiar, so the chance of him getting attacked by one of our allies mid-search was incredibly low.

[Capture him if you can, but come right back if you think he's too strong for you, alright?]

"Woof woof!"

"Start."

With a single word and nothing more, Fran ventured into the ship's interior through the nearest exit.

Our allies had already taken out most of the pirates within, so we were able to look around without any interference—or at least that was how it went until we went down a flight of stairs.

Enemies began attacking us the moment we descended, and continued to do so as we explored. Not a single one of them was anywhere close to being Fran's match, but they were still quite annoying nonetheless.

A dense aura of battlelust began to assault us as we moved a bit further along. It seemed we'd found our mark.

[Fran!]

"Nn!"

Fran traced it to a remarkably large door, which she kicked down to reveal

something along the lines of an empty warehouse.

Several adventurers and pirates were facing off against each other in the room's center. The bloodlust Fran had tracked down had originated from the two most powerful people in the room.

One was our ally, Mordred. And naturally, the other was Suarez, the pirate we'd been looking to capture.

The Sheedran prince was honestly quite strong. He had Divine Bow Arts, and several other skills indicated he was obviously an accomplished warrior. But, despite that, I didn't find him to be qualified enough to function as the captain of a pirate ship. He lacked too much in the sailing department for me to really think him a sailor.

Unfortunately, appraising him didn't tell me much about how he was controlling the dragon. None of his skills indicated that he was capable of taming or summoning monsters.

"You're idiots, retards! Did you really think you could defeat a Water Dragon Warship?"

"It's true that your ship is strong, probably the strongest there is, but that doesn't mean shit if we can just take the people aboard it."

"Gyahahaha! Nice joke! I'll torture you even more than all my usual prey before feeding you to the fishes!"

So he likes torturing the people he captures? That's pretty low...

The two combatants engaged as I pondered the prince's distasteful hobbies.

"Dorryaaaahhhh!"

Suarez swung his battleaxe straight at the crown of Mordred's head. His attack had quite the speed to it; he looked to be at least as strong as a C ranked adventurer.

But despite that, we weren't even the slightest bit concerned.

"Too slow."

"Kuh! How impertinent!"

Mordred received the blow head on with his spear and cleanly parried it—a move which appeared well within Suarez’ calculations. The axe-wielder didn’t let the resulting impact throw him off balance. He promptly twisted the weapon around and brought it back for a second slash. I had to admit, the technique was skillful, and it would’ve been more than enough for him to take down the average adventurer.

But Mordred was no average adventurer.

"Metal Control"

"W-What the!?"

"Your axe is mine. It’s already fallen under my control."

At a glance, it almost looked as if Mordred had stuck his right arm up out of desperation after realizing that he couldn’t block the attack, but of course, that wasn’t the case.

The massive axe that had seemed to be on course to sever Mordred’s arm bent out of shape the moment it was about to make contact. It almost looked like the battleaxe had actually been made out of clay and not steel.

Though Suarez had already basically lost, Mordred didn’t let up. He assured his victory by manipulating the axe’s metal and wrapping it around Suarez’ body. The way it coiled around its former wielder had almost made it appear like some sort of living creature.

Mordred’s actions had demonstrated why Lava Magic was so fearsome. It allowed its wielder to take control of and freely manipulate metal-based substances.

"Shit! What just happened!?"

Suarez’ axe, or rather, his newfound fetters, had already returned to a hardened state. The prince tried to break free, but soon found himself unable escape his restraints. The steel hadn’t just been melted down and reshaped. It’d also be strengthened.

"Guooooooooohhhhh! Release me, damn it!"

"Stop struggling. It won’t be possible for someone as weak as you to escape."



And with that, the prince was made our prisoner.

## 257. A Discussion with Suarez

"Y-Your Highness!"

"Shit! Damn you! Let our boss go!"

The prince's many subordinates immediately began kicking up a fuss the moment they realized he'd been captured.

"In the way."

"Gyaaaah!"

"Guaaaahh!"

But Fran butt into the conflict and cut them down before they could so much as make a move.

"So how did the whole pirate ship thing end up going, Fran?"

"Sank all but this one."

"That was quick. Nice job."

"You too. Captured captain."

"I was just lucky. But enough of that, let's save singing each other praises for later, shall we? We've got a bit of an interrogation to get out of the way first."

"Nn."

Suarez still had quite a bit of fight in him. His expression was fierce, and expressed that he wasn't willing to give up. That wasn't to say, however, that he wasn't intimidated. He twitched a bit, as if daunted, when Fran and Mordred approached him.

"Release me, you mongrel!"

"Why?"

"Insolent! Do you not know who I am!?"

"Let me guess. A guy that leads a group of criminal scum?"

"Filth, causes problems by being alive?"

"The lot of you are all ignorant fools! I am a man of great importance, Sheedran's king!"

"Mhm. I'm sure you are."

"How dare you!"

Mordred, being the total badass he was, ignored Suarez' shouts. He instead lifted a foot and started grinding it into the prince's face—an action that Fran soon began to imitate.

"Cease that immediately! I will allow you to acknowledge me as your lord, and yourselves as my retainers if you immediately prostrate yourselves before me and apologize!"

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. There had to be something wrong with the prince's head. He seemed to think that his offer would entice his assailants despite the fact that they'd already defeated him and tied him up.

And he meant it. The expression on his face demonstrated that the offer was as serious as could be.

"I am one of Sheedran's royals, a lord that commands water dragons. All you have to do is the natural act of licking my shoes. Do that, and I'll treat you no different from any other in my service."

There was no way the prince was simply bad at reading the mood, he must've had some sort of communication disorder or something. I was surprised he lived as long as he did, and I also now fully understood why he'd gotten ripped off the throne and deported.

Still, I could see why the pirates had taken his side. His lack of brain cells was a pretty major issue if you asked me, but he was still strong, and did still have control over a Water Dragon Warship. To them, his threats held plenty of weight; he could easily annihilate them if they failed to yield. Moreover, serving him wasn't without its merits. There were clearly many payouts, of both the immediate and potential future variety. Besides, I highly doubted he'd gotten

himself captured by them before starting to negotiate. Given all the aforementioned circumstances, their allegiance to him was almost a given.

That said, neither Fran nor Mordred had bothered caring even the slightest bit for what he had to say. They ignored everything he had to say and immediately began interrogating him.

"Tell everything about controlling water dragons."

"We won't hurt you if you tell us what we want to know."

"What!? Why would I tell you anything!? "

The prince refused to talk. I couldn't tell if he was demonstrating a royal's pride, a pirate's obstinacy, or the simple fact that he couldn't read the mood. But either way, he shut his mouth and turned his face away from his interrogators.

"Fmph."

"Guaaahh! The paiiin!"

Fed up, Fran once again jammed her foot into Suarez' face and started to grind down on it even harder than she had the first time.

"Cease that immediately, woman!"

Though many would rejoice from having Fran step on them, to the non-masochistic, it was merely a sort of humiliating torture.

"Last chance. Explain controlling water dragons."

Fran's gaze went cold. She started emitting a heavy aura of bloodlust as she looked down upon the prince. It was powerful enough to make the average person shit their pants. Still, the prince managed to both retain his wits and return her glare as he continued to complain.

"Stop going on and on about that and release me!"

A foolish move.

"Got it."

"Good. Finally, you understand. Now hurry up and undo these res-"

"Got that you won't talk yet."

"Gyaaaaah!"

"Heal. Next, feet."

"S-Stop! Cease that immediately!"

"Say please."

"H-How dare you ask that of s-"

"Fmph."

"Gyaaaaaaaaah!"

Fran continued to violently thrust me into his body and casting heal to make up for the hp he lost. At first, Suarez refused to talk. He resisted until the situation repeated itself five times over. Only then did he finally realize that he was unable to appeal to her through the use of his authority.

"P-Please stop! N-N-No more!"

He started to beg her, his face dyed in terror.

"Explain controlling water dragons. Will stab if you say anything else."

Though we didn't really care for his pleas, we did stop so we could repeat our demands.

"Fine! I'll tell you! So stop, cease your acts of viole-"

*Stab*

"Giiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!"

"Heal."

"Aarrrrgghhhh! Stop iiiit!"

"Said to only explain controlling water dragons."

"I-I understand! The water dragons are bound by contract to obey any orders made by anyone with Sheedran's first king's blood flowing through their veins. That's why they'll listen to whatever I say!"

And so, the prince began to speak. Fran threatened him every single time he

hesitated by brandishing me, whereas Mordred played more of a good cop kind of role and spoke to him almost sympathetically. The combination of these two methods allowed us to draw everything we wanted out of him. Unfortunately, dealing with him was still a pain in the ass. He would start getting all cocky and shit every single time anyone softened even the slightest bit, so Fran had ended up grinding me against his thighs upwards of 30 times throughout the process. I almost felt like we'd gone a bit overboard, but it honestly couldn't be helped. He simply just never learned his lesson.

His abnormally strong willed and ridiculous sense of pride honestly impressed me. Literally anyone else would've long broken into tears and become obedient. He, on the other hand, somehow managed to regain his defiance every other time he opened his mouth.

Still, we'd made him bend enough to learn what we'd wanted. The water dragons weren't being manipulated through the use of some sort of magic item. Their obedience to him stemmed from the first King of Sheedran's ability to use contract magic.

I was surprised to hear that the dragons the nation used today were the very same ones that they'd had from the very start. Well, sort of. The nation had started off with seven dragons. Three had fallen in battle; only four remained.

The dragons weren't the only thing that left me astonished. The device that was used to enhance them did the very same. Their boosts weren't unconditional. Bolstering the dragon's defenses came at a cost. Dragons had powerful offenses, and accidentally firing upon one's allies was quite the concern should the dragon fail to aim its attacks precisely. To that end, the device's designers had traded its capacity to autonomously use breath and other similar abilities for a magical barrier alongside greatly increased self healing and stamina. The only way for the dragon to use its long ranged attacks would be for Suarez to order it to do so.

Learning of this gave rise to a pretty big problem. We couldn't destroy the device without putting the Algieba in danger. The moment we blew it up would be the moment the dragon once again became capable of barraging our ship of its own will.

"What do?"

"The best way to handle the situation would probably be to get our friend here to order the dragon to stand down."

"Only option?"

"Yeah. Once we've done that, we can destroy the item boosting its defense before finally slaying it. We should be able to give you a hand with that last part if it's rendered defenseless."

With that decided, Fran, Mordred, and all the other adventurers present lugged Suarez up to the ship's deck. so he could order the dragon not to attack.

"It looks like we won't have any problems stopping the dragon, but destroying the defensive device it uses may need some more thought."

"Leave to me. Can teleport."

"Good point, that sounds like it'd be the best option. I'll leave destroying it up to you then."

"Nn. Then will check on device once first. Easier to teleport to known locations."

We could go back and forth between several locations with ease if we decided to drop a few beacons.

"Then leave that to you."

By "that," Fran had been referring to Suarez; she'd decided to leave him behind with Mordred.

"Yeah. Be careful."

"Nn."

With everything considered and out of the way, Fran set off towards the location Suarez had described to her.

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## 258. No Rest For the Weary

Fran and I navigated our way through the ship's interior, only to eventually stop ourselves in front of an average-looking wall. Nothing about it seemed out of the ordinary, but we were confident that it served as the entrance to the room that contained the device bolstering the water dragon's defenses. Suarez gave us a fairly thorough description when we asked him where we needed to go find it.

We investigated the wall by knocking on it a few times and confirmed that the space behind it did indeed seem hollowed out. The prince told us exactly what we needed to do to access the room, and I'd memorized all the necessary steps, but we decided to circumvent the prince's ritual through the use of brute force. The method described to us was far too complex; we simply didn't want to bother with it.

"Fmph."

Fran swung me several times and filled the wall with incisions before giving it a light kick.

The cuts themselves were so clean that they allowed the wooden surface to retain its form, but the force she applied with her foot caused the now-unstable structure to collapse. The first thing we did as we stepped into the room was gaze upon the device within. I couldn't help but immediately think of the thing we saw as the product of eccentricity. I'd only ever seen one other device like it. It was a technological oddity, one made from the union of magic and machinery, a pair of clashing concepts.

The magical part, the device's core, was comprised of two smaller pieces: a giant crystal, and the sculpture that supported it. Though the crystal shone like a jewel, my eyes were more drawn to its base, a delicately crafted carving seemingly made out of bone.

The mechanical part, the device's shell, was installed to enclose both the crystalline core and the support that held it in place. Its shape almost seemed to resemble that of a sports car's engine; metallic pipes protruded from it like mufflers.

All in all, the strange device looked like it came out of a game that mixed

steampunk elements with more fantastical ones. In other words, it appeared to be the type of device one would discover in F\*inal F\*ntasy, as opposed to something one would stumble across while playing Dr\*gon Qu\*st. Like the Algieba's propulsion device, it reminded me very much of heavy machinery even though I knew its functions were derived from a set of magical principles as opposed to the laws of physics.

"Mmph." Fran grunted as she felt a sudden wave of magical energy pulse through her body.

*"Holy crap that thing's using up a ton of mana," I thought.*

The room was constructed in such a way that magical energy wouldn't escape it. We weren't able to feel the sheer amount of magical energy whirling around within it until we entered. The device was clearly very powerful; it would've been easy to detect had the room not been manaproofed.

*Wait. What if we just took it instead? Destroying it seems like it would be a waste of a perfectly good item. The water dragon would lose its buff even if I just shove it into my dimensional storage. There really isn't any reason not to take it, is there?*

I settled on the idea of stealing the device, but decided to save working out the details for later.

*"I'm going to want to jack this thing a bit later, but let's just drop a beacon and head back up to the deck for now."*

"Nn." Fran acknowledged my suggestion, turned around, and got ready to leave.

She had originally planned on walking her way back up to the deck, but her plans were thrown off the moment I finished setting up a beacon. The boat suddenly began violently shaking from left to right and back and forth at random.

"Earthquake...?" Fran muttered.

*"Probably just feels that way because we're inside the ship. Something probably happened. Let's hurry back up to the deck."*



“Nn!” She nodded.

Fran rushed to the deck, darting through the ship’s swaying corridors and dashing up the stairs on her way. The sheer force with which the vessel continued to wobble throughout her journey seemed to indicate a major change in the status quo.

Upon arrival, we expected to see the water dragon flailing about, but we were instead greeted by a sight completely outside our expectations.

*“T-The fuck is that!?”*

“Big octopus legs?” Fran tilted her head in confusion.

*“Wait! Fuck! Those are kraken tentacles!”*

“Oh.”

The catkin nodded as she observed the long, thick, wriggling tendrils. Several of the kraken’s feelers had already wrapped themselves around the dragon, binding it and subjecting it to the oversized octopuses’ attacks.

*“What!?”* I groaned as I caught sight of our ship out of the corner of my eye.  
*“Something totally busted up one of the Algieba’s masts!”*

“There you are!” Seeing that she’d emerged from the warship’s interior, Mordred rushed over and filled Fran in on the status quo.

“What happened?” Again, she tilted her head in a questioning manner.

“Well, you see...”

He elaborated on the present state of affairs by describing the events that transpired between when we left and when we returned.

Mordred brought Suarez over to the dragon so he could order it to stand down—exactly as we discussed ahead of time. Unfortunately, the prince had other ideas. Though we hadn’t the intention, Suarez had been concerned that we would execute him once he issued the order, so he told the water dragon that he wanted it to go on a rampage. Mordred immediately attempted to threaten him into rescinding the command, but he refused. No amount of pain or punishment was enough to force the over-dignified royal into submission.

Freed from its fetters, the water dragon loosed a breath attack towards the Algieba. It tore down one of the galleon's masts and damaged its deck in the process. Our ship was sturdy enough to withstand the hit, but it wouldn't last for long if the assault continued. Fortunately, and unfortunately, the dragon was attacked by a group of kraken right before it could launch a second projectile.

"Those, kraken?" Fran pointed at the mollusks, her tone filled with curiosity.

"A whole three of them." Mordred frowned. "I guess you could say they technically saved our skins, but it looks like executing our old plan is out of the question. Let's hold off on destroying the dragon's augmentation device for now."

"Got it."

As always, Mordred's judgement was spot on. Water dragons were stronger than kraken—they would almost undoubtedly come out on top given a one versus one scenario—but the difference in strength was not nearly significant enough for the dragons to take on two kraken, let alone three. Our water dragon was currently faring quite well in combat, but only because its defenses had been bolstered. It seemed like it would probably die the moment the device supporting it was deactivated, especially given that it was already in the process of being attacked on all sides.

And if the water dragon died, the kraken would likely set their sights on the Algieba. Preserving it was undoubtedly in our best interest.

"Can't just kill all?" Fran asked as she stared down all four monsters present.

*"I do think we can, but it's probably not a good idea,"* I muttered.

Both types of monsters were highly specialized hunters. The water dragon was highly offensive, and quite dextrous. The kraken had outstanding defenses, and they were known to regenerate. I was confident that we could defeat all four monsters regardless of their specialities so long as we used both Kanna Kamui and Black Lightning Advent, but doing so would leave us exhausted—and that was incredibly short sighted.

The area we were currently in was called the Kraken's Nest. It was not only

possible, but rather likely that kraken would continue attacking us even after we left the water dragon's immediate vicinity. Draining ourselves was unwise.

"I'd say we should probably try to escape while the water dragon and kraken go at each other," Mordred suggested.

"Got it. Return to Algieba?"

"Yeah. Could I get you to move us over again? All our men are already standing by on deck and waiting for you."

Mordred had clearly already considered our options and come to a conclusion prior to our return. Both the sailors and adventurers had been organised so that they would be ready to depart at a moment's notice.

All the adventurers were present and accounted for, but we had lost a few sailors in the exchange.

*It's kind of unfortunate, but that's just how these things go,* I contemplated. A melee was a type of messy skirmish. It just wasn't possible for everyone that participated in it to come out alive.

Putting the relatively depressing thought aside, I opened a Dimension Gate so the survivors could make their way back to the Algieba.

To be honest, I was disappointed. I really wanted to kill the water dragon. I wanted both its core and the materials we could loot off its corpse. I also really wanted to steal the device that bolstered its defenses, but it looked like I would have to give it all up. Fran's safety was much more important than any amount of material gain.

All the sailors and adventurers, Mordred aside, left through the portal, leaving Fran and the B ranker as the last two individuals remaining on the enemy's ship.

"Give me a second," he commanded. "I'll cast a spell to make it harder for them to chase us down."

"Doing what?"

"I can't do too much against monsters this strong, but I should at least be able to lock them down a bit."

Mordred pulled an elixir out from one of his pockets and swallowed its

contents in a single gulp. I appraised the strange liquid and identified it as an item that drastically increased both one's proficiency in lava magic and overall magical prowess for several minutes.

"There goes a whole year's worth of income," the B ranker grumbled.

"That expensive?"

"Yeah, but it's worth it. It's extremely effective and doesn't have any side effects."

Wait, just how much does a B ranker make in a year anyways? Hmm... Probably somewhere around three million a year, I guess? Wait, that potion costs three whole million? Shit! Though I guess it does kind of seem like it'd be worth it...

Consuming the potion had boosted Mordred's magical powers by a factor of five. He promptly took advantage of his strengthened abilities and cast a spell.

"Vulcan's Order!"

The warship's two anchors floated over to Mordred from their respective positions. He manipulated the two 10 meter wide lumps of metal, melted them down and merged them to form a single, massive, steel serpent—a feat that would have been impossible had he not consumed an expensive potion.

The massive metallic snake abided his commands. It wrapped itself around both the oversized octopuses and the dragon they were assaulting and bound them as it hardened. Despite their size, the monsters were unable to escape. His spell locked them in place.

"Whew..." He relaxed his shoulders and heaved a sigh. "I've strengthened it as much as I could, but it won't last too long against monsters that powerful. Let's get out of here."

"Okay." Fran grabbed Suarez—who'd been rendered unconscious after refusing to listen to Mordred one too many times—and followed the more experienced adventurer through the portal and back onto the Algieba.

After passing through the gate, she turned around and gave us a bigger picture view of the whole kraken-dragon engagement. Frankly, it looked like a

fight between several of the giant monsters you'd often see in P\*wer R\*ngers.

"Wow." Fran stared at them as they struggled against one another and their newfound metal bindings.

*"Any ship that gets caught up in that is bound to sink,"* I mused.

Mordred's spell denied the water dragon the opportunity to chase us. We would, without a doubt, be able to open up some distance between it and us so we could escape.

"More."

*"Oh god, there's even more!?"* Fran's statement caused me to panic.

Another Kraken appeared on the water dragon ship's stern, seemingly attracted by the commotion.

"Man the sails! Full speed ahead, get us the 'ell out of here immediately!" Jerome yelled.

"Master. There, look."

*"Wher—Oh shit. You have got to be kidding me."*

Only then did I realize that, by "more," Fran hadn't been referring to the kraken, but rather, the arrival of another sort of creature, one that looked like it'd come straight out of the realm of nightmares.

*"Fran! Get the crew's attention! Make sure it gets noticed!"*

"Nn. Big enemy!" She quietly nodded and voiced her agreement before yelling in a voice loud enough for all the sailors to hear.

"Big...? Ohhhh fuck!"

"The hell is that thing!?"

"You've gotta be kidding me!"

"Shit, shit!"

"Oh come on!"

Their eyes widened as they caught sight of the creature she'd directed their attention towards.

*“Well, no rest for the weary, I guess,”* I grumbled as I examined the monster’s features.

The grotesque critter was one that I recognized on sight, one I highly doubted I’d ever be able to forget.

Its body was covered in a thick layer of reddish, yellow-brown skin. Its head looked very much like that of a sea anemone’s, but, with massive fangs lining the inside of its mouth.

A creature known as a parasite that plagued the ocean and leeches off of its life.

A midgard wyrm.

## 259. The Water Dragon’s Demise

The Midgard Wyrms wriggled its body as it rapidly darted through the sea at an incredible speed.

Fortunately, the Algieba wasn’t its target. It was instead headed straight for the water dragon warship, seemingly because it wanted to attack the monsters in its vicinity.

Or at least that was what I’d thought at first.

"Nn? Midgard wyrms disappeared?"

[Did it dive out of view or something?]

Wait, wasn’t it supposed to be heading straight towards the kraken and water dragon?

The midgard wyrm resurfaced the moment I questioned its actions.

"Gyagogogooooooooo!"

It attacked the still entwined dragon and kraken from directly below, a tactic likely derived from its instincts rather than its intellect.

The midgard wyrm raised their bodies about 10m into the air as a testament to its brute strength before leaning itself on the water dragon warship. Unable to handle the monster's ridiculous weight, the symbol of Sheedran's might creaked and snapped in two.

The resulting shockwave caused the ocean's tides to turn violent and rock the Algieba as would a heavy storm.

"Uwawawawa!"

"Don't fall into the sea!"

The midgard wyrm's sea anemone-like mouth once again emerged from the ocean with a water dragon's neck and several kraken tentacles hanging from its mouth.

"Kuoooooon...."

The plesiosaurus-like monster, which normally would've had the might to decimate a large city, whimpered feebly. It was no longer capable of action.

"Gyooooooooooo!"

The midgard wyrm's proud cry echoed throughout the sea, as if to declare its victory.

"This is looking bad. Hurry the 'ell up, you bilge rats! We need to get outta here immediately!"

"Yessir!"

"Can we actually escape a midgard wyrm, Captain?"

"No clue. It's way faster than us, but we might be able to get away if it decides to attack some more kraken instead of chasing us down."

Jerome's response to Mordred's question was grim.

Mydgard wyrms swallowed things whole, so they didn't have to stop to chew. In fact, eating didn't inhibit them from moving in any which way. They were known for consuming everything in an area and then slowly digesting it all later.

Still, we would have more than enough time to get away if it first went after all the kraken and the pirates that'd fallen into the sea. But unfortunately,

things weren't going to work out that conveniently for us.

"Looked this way."

[It's heading for us cause our ship's bigger than pretty much anything else it can find, it seems]

It swiveled its head around a bunch and examined its surroundings before finally looking back at us.

Following its instincts, it headed towards the biggest prey it could see, our ship.

It rapidly closed in on us.

"Black Lightning Princess! I need you to do us a favour!"

Jerome ran over to us. Behind him were several sailors carrying a huge barrel.

"What?"

"I need you to fly again, and dump this barrel somewhere off opposite the direction we're headed. It's filled with stuff midgard wyrms love, it should be attracted by its scent and stop chasing us."

"Nn. Got it."

"Thanks. Here's to hoping it actually works."

The barrel was normally supposed to be used before the wyrm got as close as it was, but Jerome hadn't had the chance to issue the order. He had been preoccupied by the water dragon/kraken fight. He didn't know how much effect it would have given the lack of distance, but he wanted to at least try gambling on it nonetheless.

[Alright, let's try dropping it.]

"Nn. Urushi, go."

"Woof!"

Fran took the barrel, leapt on Urushi's back, and had him run straight behind the midgard wyrm before dropping the cylindrical, wooden casket into the sea. It broke open as it hit the water's surface and spilled its contents all over.



[Is it working?]

"Nn... No."

[Tsk.]

The red, yellow and brown abomination was more attracted to the Algieba than the stuff it apparently loved due to the ship's proximity. And as such, it continued to rush the ship down.

Looking at the wyrm from our angle really emphasized its size. The goddamn thing was massive.

[What about getting its attention by attacking it?]

"Nn! Thunderbolt."

"Groooooowl!"

[Flare Blast!]

We fired spells at the midgard wyrm's exposed back so we could draw its attention away from the ship. I figured that, if we were lucky, we'd be able to draw its attention to the barrel—but we weren't.

[Damn it! It's totally ignoring us!]

It was too big. Our weaker strikes were too insignificant for it to note.

[How about this then!? Thor's Hammer!]

A thunderbolt struck the midgard wyrm dead on and caused an explosion, but not even that was enough to stop the creature's charge. It cared much more for eating than it did for our attacks.

(Master, what now?)

[Well... Honestly, our only hope at getting its attention is probably going to be getting between it and the ship. Looks like it's either sink or swim.]

Fighting the midgard wyrm head on was our only choice. I wasn't confident we could beat it, but we didn't need to. We just needed to hit it hard enough to stop it in its tracks.

We went back to the ship and told its captain that we were going to hit the

monster really hard. We also made sure they were aware that Fran would end up exhausted thereafter. She wouldn't be able to fight anymore.

"Don't be ridiculous! There's no way you could beat a midgard wyrm, is there!?"

Jerome was shocked by the suggestion.

"Might at least slow down."

"I guess you're right... Our only choice is to leave it up to you."

"No problem."

"Make sure you come back in one piece, alright?"

"To adventurers, own life most important"

"Gahahaha! Good point. Then do your best. Show that thing hell."

"Nn!"

The task entrusted to us was a simple one. All we had to do was put all our power into one attack and blast it right at the midgard wyrm before retreating.

[Urushi, focus all your efforts in making sure Fran stays safe on her way back, alright?]

"Woof."

And if worse comes to worst, I'll think of something and hopefully handle the situation myself. But enough of that for now. I'll cross that bridge when I get to it.

## 260. The Legendary Monster

[Alright, let's do this!]

"Nn! Awakening."

Fran awakened as she looked down at the midgard wyrm from Urushi's back. She went full throttle right off the bat and immediately activated Brilliant Lightning Rush.

The electricity radiating off her body caused Urushi's fur to stand on end.

[Let's start by provoking it and making it raise its head.]

"Got it."

"Woof."

[And when it opens its mouth, we hit it with everything we've got.]

"Nn! Urushi."

"Woof woof!"

Urushi slowed down, bravely placed himself right in front of the midgard wyrm, and fired several spells at the creature's submerged head.

[Leave attacking it while it's still underwater to me.]

Urushi's attacks weren't having too much of an effect, so I asked him to relinquish his role as an attacker for the time being.

Taking his place, I dove underwater. I made a beeline for its face and started blasting it with lightning and explosions.

It ignored the first strike, but the second and third ticked it off enough for it to start to twitch.

[Alright, this should do the trick.]

I threw in a telekinetic catapult just for good measure and charged straight at the monster's head. I didn't expect it to do too much damage given the amount I was being slowed by the water resistance, but for some odd reason, the attack managed to get a huge reaction out of the midgard wyrm. It stopped moving and loosed a loud roar the moment it got hit.

"Gyobobobobooo!"

The sea stirred. The massive shockwave spawned from its bellow caused the ocean's waves to violently rock through my surroundings.

[Woah!?!]

I didn't take any damage from the shockwave, but it sure as hell fucked me up. The resulting water pulses knocked me around and disoriented me to the

point where I couldn't tell up from down.

I was surprised. It seemed really mad, and I didn't understand why. The telekinetic catapult's damage shouldn't have differed much from my spells'.

After hurrying back to Fran, I realized that the wyrm was totally locked onto us. It raised its head out of the water and stared us down with its neck curved like a goose's. Though its face lacked eyes, I could tell it was giving us a hateful glare. It wanted to kill us so badly that its body had started radiating pure enmity.

"Did something?"

[Dunno. It suddenly got all pissed right after I hit it with a telekinetic catapult.]

"Remembered last fight?"

[Last fight?]

"Nn? Last time, blasted face off with telekinetic catapult."

[Wait, that's the same one we fought last time?]

"Nn."

The monster had higher hp than it did last time we saw it, and I'd known that it was possible for the midgard wyrm to grow infinitely, but I'd still presumed it a different individual.

Fran, however, was somehow able to tell that it was the exact same individual. Maybe it's just a beastkin thing?

But that would mean that this wyrm's the exact same one we fed all the monoliths.

[So it remembered me even though it's dumb as a single celled organism?]

Does it not forget grudges? Oh well, it's not the only one that still wanted to fight. It was time for us to show it just how much we'd grown since our last conflict, even if we had to end up running away.

It tried chasing Urushi down, but it was far too big to catch him. He could easily slip somewhere it was harder for the massive creature to reach.

The act of him running around bought me enough time to get my spell ready.

[I'm good to go, Fran.]

"Nn!"

We struck the moment it tried to attack Urushi, and launched our attacks straight into its mouth.

[Now! Kanna Kamuiiiii!]

"Haaaah! Black Lightning Advent!"

My spell, a dragon made of pure white lightning, mixed with Fran's, a burst of jet black lightning, and flew straight into the wyrm's interior.

I used the sorcery skill to put 80% of the mp I had left into the attack and hit the midgard wyrm with the most powerful Kanna Kamui we'd ever used to date. Likewise, Fran had also poured every last bit of her mana into her black thunderbolts.

The wyrm's head exploded into a million pieces. Blood, flesh, and other fragments of the sea serpent's body, flew all over the place and fell around us like pieces of a deflated balloon. The explosion had been huge; it covered an area 50 meters in diameter.

It caused waves to pour through the ocean and crash into the Algieba. I quickly turned towards the ship out of concern to check on it, and breathed a sigh of relief after confirming it was still fine.

The only reason it didn't get capsized was because the wyrm's thick ass body had absorbed most of the impact. In a sense, one could say that the wyrm had actually stopped the ship from flipping over.

Speaking of which, the wyrm itself was a terrible sight to behold. A third of its body was flat out missing. Serpent and centipede type monsters were known for their vitality, but the wound was so bad it looked like it would've been more than fatal for any normal member of either of the two aforementioned types.

But the midgard wyrm was an A ranked magic beast, a creature far outside the realm of human imagination. Though its defenses were lackluster, the injury we'd given it was far from fatal.

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## General Information

Species: Midgard Wyrms (Sea Serpent Type Monster)

Level 62

HP: 28117/39823

MP: 591

STR: 4139

VIT: 4699

AGI: 108

INT: 5

MGC: 112

DEX: 24

## Skills

Absorption: Lv 2

Regeneration: Lv 2

Predation

---

It still had over two thirds of its max health, and it was already starting to rapidly regenerate.

[Fuck, that thing's a monster. But we at least managed to slo—oh shit.]

"Not... good..."

Wait, what the fuck!? That thing's headed for the Algieba even though it doesn't have a head!? How is it already moving!? Aren't you normally supposed to wait for your missing body part to regenerate before you start doing shit again!?

Is its brain not in its head, or does it have multiple, like how it has a bunch of different hearts? Wait, does it even have a brain in the first place?

Fuck! Thinking about this shit is just a huge waste of time!

[Urushi, get in front of it again!]

"Woof!"

The only choice I had was to use the rest of my mana to hit it with another Kanna Kamui. And if that didn't stop it, I'd have no choice but to use my real

trump card.

"Mas...ter... okay?"

[Yeah. I'll be fine. You can sit back and rest for now.]

"Nn."

I left Fran to Urushi and leapt off so I could focus on casting my spell. I wasn't expecting it to do much. I didn't have enough mana.

[I really want to avoid using Latent Potential Release unless I really have to.]

Things were looking pretty grim. I was probably going to have to use it in the end—or at least that was what I thought was going to happen.

[Huh?]

The situation suddenly took an unexpected turn.

I felt a powerful, imposing presence. It was several kilometers away, but it was incredibly overbearing nonetheless. The speed at which the *thing* came at us was incredible. It looked like it was somewhere around the 500 km/h range.

[Fuck, that thing's huge!]

There was no other way to put it. The only part I could see was the part sticking out of the water, the thing I presumed to be its dorsal fin. That alone was already 20 meters high and 100 long. I was certain that the thing coming at us was some sort of monster.

[Urushi, get the hell out of here!]

"W-Woof!"

Retreating, I returned to Fran's side. Urushi was terrified; he was trembling with his tail between his legs. Fortunately, he still somehow managed to move his way back over to the Algieba.

"Master, that, what?"

[No idea. Appraisal won't work because I can only see its fin.]

That said, I had more than enough information to guess. Its aura carried way more magical energy than the midgard wyrms. It was clearly a monster even

more powerful than the one we'd just fought.

"Master, that."

[I knew it!]

The mystery monster rushed the midgard wrym and attacked it.

"Gaaaaaooooooooooooooooooooo!"

It drove its fangs into the midgard wyrms body and lifted it, and in doing so, showcased its 100m long neck. It was adorned from head to tail in beautiful scales, like a kingfisher. I couldn't help but feel that it both resembled a dragon and a sort of serpent.

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**General Information**

Species: Leviathan (Oceanic Divine Dragon//Divine Beast)

Lv 87

HP: 92336

MP: 36887

STR: 181397

VIT: 22699

AGI: 3123

INT: 6039

MGC: 9996

DEX: 1698

**Skills**

Unknown

**Description**

Unknown

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[Haaaah...hahahaha]

Appraising caused me to break into laughter. There simply wasn't anything for me to do but laugh. It was so strong I couldn't even see its skills. It was a veritable S ranked monster, a ridiculously overpowered creature capable of



destroying the entire world if it wished to.

Just appraising it had completely drained me of the will to fight.

I immediately began to think of the worst case scenario, and what I needed to do. If the Leviathan attacked, then my only choice would be to abandon the Algieba and focus on preserving Fran.

I would have to teleport us away the moment it showed even the slightest sign of aggression.

Right as I started working out the details, the leviathan looked at us—but its eyes lacked even the slightest semblance of hostility.

Its gaze instead seemed to momentarily reflect a sense of amusement, as if it was entertained. The impression only seemed to last for a second, so I wrote it off as just my imagination. I assumed that I'd started deluding because of how much I'd hoped it wouldn't antagonize us.

Either way, the leviathan ended up leaving; it turned around and nonchalantly carried off the midgard wrym despite its desperate struggles to break free of the more powerful monster's grasp.

[It looks like... it let us off the hook...?]

"Nn..."

"Whimper..."

## 261. Returning to the Ship

Though the leviathan, the Divine Beast, had saved us, it'd also kind created its own sort of trouble for the sole reason that encountering it was nothing short of extraordinary. Upon returning to the ship, we'd realized that everyone had totally lost their wits.

Some had spaced out, whereas others had started smiling like idiots. There was even a group that'd started to offer the heavens their prayers.

Like basically everyone else, Jerome and his first mate had been unable to respond in their usual manners. Instead, they'd started laughing dryly.

I was honestly impressed that the Algieba was still upright and floating. The crew's current state seemed to indicate that it should've already capsized, especially given what'd just happened. The leviathan was huge, so massive waves accompanying its advent were only a given—

—Except they weren't.

It somehow managed to avoid disturbing the ocean and creating waves despite its massive size.

*Does that mean it was trying to avoid capsizing the Algieba? Nah, no way, right? It was probably just coincidentally using something that let it swim faster through the reduction of water resistance or something.*

Mordred, Jerome, and Buphett regained their senses in that order, mostly because that was the order Fran decided to lightly shake them in.

Despite being known for his calmness and rationality, he was panicked. The event had shocked him enough to make him start shouting hysterically the moment he finally regained his capacity of speech.

"Shit! I just sweat enough cold sweat for a whole goddamn lifetime. I'm surprised my heart didn't stop. Holy fuck, that was absolutely terrifying. I think I'm not going to accept any boat related escort jobs for a good while!" Mordred screamed.

We ran into a water dragon, some kraken, a midgard wyrm, and then the S ranked leviathan to top it all off. We had a total of four different encounters in a matter of moments. Each one of the four groups of creatures was powerful enough to cause instant death, and hence, we'd ended up getting swept into a series of fierce battles. It'd been far too much to take in, even for Mordred. The experienced adventurer had been reduced to a terrified mess.

"Dude. Woah. Shit. Did ya see that thing? Did ya!?" Jerome, on the other hand, was excited as all hell. He was leaning over the ship's edge and staring off in the direction the leviathan had went.

"Aye, captain... But I do have to say, I never did imagine we'd see it around these parts..." Buphett commented. "Wait, what if..."

Unlike the other two, Buphett's state was more akin to one of suspicion. He'd already moved on to questioning the leviathan's motives.

"Leviathan, only supposed to show up in demonic ocean?" Fran directed her question towards Jerome, as his state of mind had seemed much more sound than that of anyone else present.

*Man, that thing was god damned massive. It would've have measured somewhere in the 100m range even if you only looked everything from the base of its neck up till the tip of its nose. Its head alone seemed to be about 40-50m tall. I didn't see how it could've possibly even fit around these parts. The deepest areas apparently only go 300m down, meaning there are likely many spots with a depth of 100m or less.*

Given its size, the leviathan most likely would have ended up scraping itself around the ocean floor as it moved about.

"That's how it's always been in the past, but the past and the present are clearly two completely different things. S'true that it's only ever been seen in the demonic sea, but, that ain't enough evidence for us to say that it'll never show up anywhere else. The thing's a goddamn legend. Ain't no way for us humans to understand everything 'bout it," Jerome shrugged.

*Yeah, makes sense. There isn't any reason for it not to leave its nest to hunt and what not, especially seeing as how it literally just did exactly that.*

There was no reason for the leviathan to stay in a small, confined area given its speed. There seemed to be a good chance that it just so happened to have only been sighted in the demonic sea, and that it was actually moving around and going wherever it wanted while remaining under water all the time.

“Alrighty, now that that’s over with, we should probably get the ‘ell outta ‘ere,” the captain quickly recovered and got back on task.

“That seems like quite a good idea. All the kraken have fled due to their fear of the leviathan, so we’ve got ourselves just the chance we need.” Likewise, his first mate also refocused himself on a more immediate set of priorities.

The kraken were no match for the midgard wyrm or leviathan, so they’d all long escaped the area. Likewise, the pirates we’d cast into the ocean were also nowhere to be seen. They’d all either been dragged off by kraken, swallowed by the sea serpent, or simply caught in the massive waves that resulted from the creatures’ advent and washed away.

“So what are we going to do with him?” The first thing Mordred did after regaining his wits was kicking the prisoner rolling around at his feet. Suarez just happened to have gotten brought back to the Algieba because that was simply the most natural flow of things. He was still unconscious, mostly due to all the pain Mordred had inflicted on him while trying to get him to fold.

“What do you say to randomly dumping him somewhere?” He commented while giving the man another kick.

*There isn’t really any point in keeping him alive much longer seeing as how the dragon is already gone and whatnot, but he is still royalty, so keeping him alive might present us with some sort of merit.*

He could be used as a sort of bargaining chip, but at the same time, it was also possible for him to end up functioning to ignite some sort of political conflict. There was no way for us to know the consequences of our actions for sure, so we instead chose to leave the decision in a more qualified person’s hands. That is, we had Jerome, a man officially sanctioned by the Beastkin’s country, make the final call.

“Hmm... I’d say we’d best keep ‘im in the ship’s hold for now,”

“Aye, captain, I agree, especially seeing as how he might even have some sort of bounty on his head,” Buphett added.

“You don’t say. Stealing one of those Water Dragon Warships is a surefire way to earn a country’s ire,” the captain smirked.

A part of me had thought that it might’ve ended up being some sort of gift, but apparently that was definitely not the case. Every Water Dragon Warship was a vital part of the country’s forces. Having one rampage about was prone to leading to diplomatic problems.

In other words, there was no way Suarez had any claim to the ship he’d been in possession of.

“It’d be much more convenient for us to get rid of ‘im, but I’d say he’s got enough use to keep around,” Jerome grumbled.

With that, Suarez’ fate was decided. Mordred took him in the hold and organised the adventurers so they could keep watch.

“How are you feeling, princess?”

With all urgent business dealt with, Jerome turned back towards Fran and asked her about her condition.

“She looks quite exhausted to me,” his first mate commented.

“Nn... Body feels heavy.”

The Black Lightning Advent Fran put all her power into had drained her of most of her stamina and magic. She could still walk, but she lacked the ability to engage in any sort of serious conflict.

“I would expect so, seeing the amount of power behind the attack you launched. I doubt you’ll be able to perform too well in combat as you are right now, so please do get back to your room and get some rest.” Buphett dismissed her from her duties so she could heal up and be ready for any battles to come going forward.

“Nn. Will do.”

We decided to have Urushi guard the deck in Fran’s place while she rested. He and Mordred would probably be more than enough to handle any monsters

that came the ship's way while Fran was out of commission.

*"We're counting on you Urushi."*

"Do best."

"Woof!"

## 262. Greyseal

Two days had passed since we'd run into the Leviathan and nearly met our demises.

"Drop the anchors!" Jerome shouted.

"Aye aye captain!"

"One of you is going to need to run over to the magistrate's office. We've a serious political situation on our hands, one involving royalty," Buphett noted as the crew began getting to work.

"Yes sir!" One of the sailors immediately responded and began running an errand as per his instructions.

The Algieba managed to safely reach Chrom. More specifically, it found itself currently docked in the port of a seaside city named Greyseal. Both the city and the port were about a whole size smaller than Barbra's, but still of a respectable scale nonetheless.

All the adventurers had already gotten off the ship after receiving a hefty bonus. The total number of battles we engaged in was on the relatively low side, but they rewarded us handsomely nonetheless given the whole midgard wyrm incident. Fran in particular had been paid a whole hundred thousand golde.

With her duties completed and remunerations rewarded, she, like all the other adventurers, had gotten off the ship. She was currently standing in front of it, saying her goodbyes to her three apprentices.

"Thank you very much, Ms. Fran."

“You taught us a whole lot.”

“We’ll do our best to make sure we keep training ourselves hard! We’ll get strong enough to impress you next time we see each other!”

Naria, Miguel and Liddick responded in their usual ways as they got ready to leave, to which Fran responded with a simple “Nn.”

“Good bye!”

“Later!”

“Farewell!”

Their training had only lasted a few days, but it seemed to have been impactful nonetheless, as the three all seemed to have taken her teachings quite seriously. Fran had tried her best to play the role of an instructor as well, albeit seemingly because she wanted to kill time. I couldn’t tell whether or not she really thought of them as her apprentices. She didn’t seem reluctant to part with them, and I wasn’t even really sure whether she ever ended up remembering their names.

*“We should probably head out too.”*

“Miguel, Naria, Liddick,” I had many doubts about her stance on the matter, but Fran struck them all down before I even so much as had a chance to voice them by calling out to her three apprentices in turn.

“Huh?” Miguel’s jaw dropped.

“Teach just called us by our names!? That has to be the first time she’s ever done that!”

“D-Does that mean she’s acknowledged us?” Likewise, Naria and Liddick also responded with their voices filled by surprise.

“See ya.”

“See ya, teach!”

All three immediately responded in loud, clear voices.

Satisfied, Fran turned around and began to move without so much as even showing any sign of turning back.

*“So you actually did end up memorizing their names?”*

*“Nn. Because apprentices.”*

Fran’s response made it clear that she’d taken from the experience and matured, even if only a bit. As her guardian, I was overjoyed, both because she’d grown up and because a part of me empathized with her disciples. She’d reciprocated their emotions; their efforts hadn’t been in vain.

The first place Fran decided to head towards was the guild so she could pick up the request’s standard reward. She didn’t know where it was though, so she had Mordred and his buddies show her over.

“It should be right over there,” Mordred gestured towards the guild as it came into sight.

“Huge.”

“That’d be because Greyseal is a pretty big city.”

Greyseal’s guild wasn’t too far away from its port. The building was quite large, as per Fran’s description. Apparently, it was relatively influential because it was frequented by adventurers that liked picking up ship-related escort tasks.

Upon entering, we found ourselves staring down a bar with a large number of adventurers hanging around it. Some seemed to gaze upon Fran in one of many unrespectful ways, but quickly averted their eyes once they saw Mordred enter right behind her.

Being a B ranker, Mordred was quite well known, even in Greyseal. There weren’t any adventurers dumb enough to mess with anyone accompanying him.

Fran was both a cute child and a Black Catkin, so I expected a few people to try messing with her, but fortunately, it didn’t look like we would need to bother this time around. Though no one tried to explicitly attack her, that didn’t actually mean we didn’t have to deal with any sort of annoyances. A bearded, lazy looking middle aged man that seemed a bit too thin to be an adventurer waded through the crowd and approached us.

My immediate thought was that we were going to have to deal with him and



whatever idiocy he would pull, but I was well off the mark.

“That’s a cute girl you found there Mordred. Is she travelling with you?” The lanky looking man grinned as he spoke in a teasing tone.

“Oh, hey Leroy. You’re a bit off the mark this time. She and I just happened to be escorting the same ship. It was her first time in Greyseal, so I lended her a hand and showed her over to the guild.”

“Huh. Well, I guess I’d better introduce myself then. The name’s Leroy, I work as an adventurer around these parts.”

“He’s only a D ranker, but he’s got great memory, so he can come in handy. I’ve often asked him for help so I could work around these parts without needing a map,” Mordred nodded as he affirmed the other man’s usefulness.

The fact that even Mordred asked him for help made me understand that Leroy was a respectable adventurer in his own right even though he didn’t look the part.

“Nn. C ranker, Fran.” The catgirl named herself curtly.

“You’re a C ranker at *that* age!? I could tell that you were pretty strong, but god damn!” Leroy’s eyes opened wide in response to Fran’s introduction, a reaction that caused Mordred to put on a bit of a wry smile and look at Leroy with an almost pitying gaze. He’d only just called Fran out the other day for being way stronger than was justified for a C ranker.

“I think you might want to change the way you introduce yourself, Fran,” he suggested.

“Why? Not lying.”

“That’s true, but I think you should at least make sure you mention that you’re the Black Lightning Princess.”

“What? She’s the Black Lightning Princess everyone’s been talking about lately?”

“That she is, friend.”

“That would mean she’s way stronger than me... Man, and her rank made me think we weren’t all that different in terms of our combat ability too...” Leroy

was completely taken aback by Fran's identity.

It seemed that information about Fran had already made its way to Greyseal through the merchants given Leroy's reaction and willingness to accept Fran's identity. Mordred, once again, had voiced a really good point that proved his judgement solid. Fran would be able to stop people from looking down on her so long as she revealed a bit more about herself.

There was, however, a certain risk related to Mordred's suggestion. Anyone that had yet to hear about Fran's exploits would likely think her an idiot with a self proclaimed identity. I wouldn't be able to stand for someone making fun of her as a result.

For that reason, we decided to stick with the C ranker thing for the time being.

"You serious!?"

"That's the Black Lightning Princess?"

"Wait, the Black Lightning Princess is here!? Where!?"

"Damn!"

"Y-Yo, you serious?"

It seemed that all the adventurers present had heard of her, as they immediately began kicking up a huge fuss. Some stood up in order to get a better look at Fran, while others let their curiosity get so out of control that they approached despite the heavy aura Mordred was giving off.

The reaction we got out of making Fran's identity public was even bigger than the one we'd gotten back in Barbra. Upon further observation, I realized that over 90% of the adventurers were beastkin, and that the beastkin were much more curious about Fran than I'd initially thought. Though their interests were far outside my expectations, I did at least understand them. Black Catkin weren't supposed to be able to evolve, but Fran had done it nonetheless. But more importantly, she had defeated Goldalfa, a veritable hero that all of the country's citizens knew.

"Did that little girl really manage to beat Goldalfa?"

“That’s what they say. It’s probably true too, seein’ as how the info came from a merchant sanctioned by the crown.”

“Must’ve been because he let her win though, right?”

“Huh, you’ve got a point. It might be one of those public appearance things.”

“Are you guys stupid? We’re talking about Goldalfa here, there’s no way he’d ever do that.”

“Yeah man, there’s no way Goldalfa would just fork over a win, especially not to a kid. That’d tarnish his reputation.”

“Exactly. You all know he’s not the type to pull his punches.”

“And you’ve gotta consider this. It wasn’t a spar either. I could see him holding back if it was a spar, but Ulmutt’s tournament lets its participants fight for real, so he must’ve been going all out.”

A fair number of the adventurers seemed to think that Goldalfa had allowed Fran to beat him. I couldn’t really refute their sentiments. It was quite hard to believe unless you were actually there.

People continued to stare at Fran even as she turned in her quest.

“And she’s really evolved too.”

“I know, right?”

“How the hell did she manage that?”

“I remember the merchants saying something about killing evil beings. I don’t remember the details though, ’cause I thought it was bullshit at the time.”

We’d long turned Evolution Concealment off so we could spread the idea that Black Catkin were indeed capable of evolution.

The merchants and nobles had already started to spread the method we told the Beast Lord. People would probably start believing it once we went around and showed off that Fran really had evolved.

Gazes continued to follow Fran all the way up to the moment she finally left.

*“Alright, let’s find ourselves a place to spend the night and figure out how we’re supposed to get to the capital.”*

“Nn.”

---

Stats below. Note: skills in master’s memory excluded by author

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**General Information**

Name: Master  
Wielder: Fran (Bound)  
Species: Intelligent Weapon  
Attack: 672  
MP: 4800/4800  
Durability: 4600/4600  
Magical Conductivity: A+

**Skills**

Appraisal: MAX  
Appraisal Blocking  
Shape Shifting  
High Speed Self Repair  
Self Evolution (Rank 13 *Cores Absorbed: 83789100 Memory: 124 / Points: 0* )  
Transformation (Superiorized)  
Telekinesis  
Lesser Telekinetic Boost  
Telepathy  
Lesser Attack Boost  
Space/Time Magic: MAX  
Skill Sharing  
Intermediate Wielder Status Boost  
Lesser Wielder Recovery Boost  
Eye of Empyrea  
Unsealable  
Lesser MP Boost  
Knowledge of Monsters  
Sorcerer  
Intermediate Memory Boost

**Unique Skills**

Principle of Falsehood: Lv 5  
Dimensional Magic: Lv 4

**Superior Skills**

Sword Arts SP  
Skill Taker  
Doppelganger Synthesis SP

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**General Information**

Name: Fran  
Age: 12  
Species: Beastkin (Black Cat/Black Heavenly Tiger)  
Class: Magic Warrior  
Status: Bound by Contract  
Level: 45/99  
HP: 551  
MP: 432  
STR: 306  
VIT: 240  
AGI: 295  
INT: 212  
MGC: 241  
DEX: 210

**Skills**

Espionage: Lv 5  
Wind Magic: Lv 2  
Court Etiquette: Lv 4  
Presence Detection: Lv 6  
Sword Techniques: Lv 7  
Sword Arts: Lv 8  
Evil Resistance: Lv 1  
Blink: Lv 6  
Fire Magic: Lv 5

Lightning Magic: Lv 1  
Cooking: Lv 2  
Trap Disarmament: Lv 2  
Trap Detection: Lv 2  
Undead Killer  
Evil Killer  
Insect Killer  
Vigour Manipulation  
Goblin Killer  
Sound of Mind  
Demon Killer  
Skilled Dismantler  
Conviction  
Sense of Direction  
Magic Manipulation  
Night Vision

### **Innate Skills**

Awakening  
Brilliant Lightning Rush  
Magic Convergence

### **Special Skills**

Black Cat's Protection

### **Titles**

Undead Killer  
Match For a Thousand  
Evil Killer  
Insect Killer  
Lord of Dismantling  
Recovery Magic User  
Sword Lord  
Goblin Killer  
One Who Massacres  
Skill Collector

Skill Maniac  
Dungeon Conquerer  
Super Big Eater  
Demon Killer  
Fire Magic User  
Wind Magic User  
Lightning Magic User  
King of Cooking

## 263. The Horned Carriage Association

We found ourselves wandering around the suburbs not too long after we booked ourselves a place to stay the night. The original plan was for us to head back to the guild so we could figure out what we needed to do in order to get back to the capital, but speaking with the lady running the inn we chose had caused us to change our minds.

The innkeeper was a businessman with a whole plethora of connections. The combination of the information she'd gotten from her peers and her instincts as a beastkin had immediately allowed her to identify Fran the moment she walked through the door. As a result, she'd treated Fran with as much fidelity as she could possibly manage. That is, she offered the best room she had for an extremely discounted price.

She then went on to declare that she would treat the form Fran filled out as a family heirloom before hearing out our plans and giving us a bit of advice.

It was precisely her advice that led us to our current destination.

"That?" Fran tilted her head as she pointed to a building that seemed to match what the innkeeper had described to her.

*"I think so. The roof's blue, and structure makes it look kinda like a barn. It's pretty much a perfect match."*

Approaching the building a bit more confirmed that it was the exact one we were looking for; the sign hanging outside it labeled it as a branch of the Horned Carriage Association.

“Welcome,” a calm, collected woman in her twenties called out to us as we entered the building. She looked quite similar to the type of girl one would often find working at the Adventurers’ Guild, with the sole difference being that her uniform had been swapped out for another.

Unlike the innkeeper we met earlier, the association’s receptionist was human, so she didn’t immediately identify Fran. Many of the people we’d met along the way, however, did. Most of the people she walked by totally froze over the moment they realized that she wasn’t just any average black catkin. Even those that had yet to hear about the Black Lightning Princess ended up stopping and staring the moment they realized that she had evolved.

Some of the older men that saw her had been shocked so far out of their wits that they started worshiping her on the spot. All in all, she was treated kinda like the type of mythical creature that bless with happiness all that managed to spot it — basically every beastkin she came across would stop in their tracks just to get a good look at her.

“Want information,” Fran got to business and began questioning the clerk as I recalled the events that’d just transpired.

“Might this be your first time riding a horned carriage?”

“Nn.”

The receptionist gave us a quick overview and explained the services the Horned Carriage association offered. Simply put, they basically provided a transportation service. They rented out carriages pulled by Dual Horns, rhino-like monsters with high speed and endurance. They took very few breaks, so they were able to reach their destinations roughly twice as quickly as horses could. They themselves were considered F ranked monsters, so they could also function to scare off thieves and other weaker potential assailants.

“I see,” Fran nodded.

“Here are the prices,” the receptionist showed Fran a piece of paper with a whole bunch of numbers written all over it. The fees seemed to vary based off of two main factors. The first was whether or not one was willing to share a carriage with other passengers. The second had to do with the amount of distance traveled.



“Want to go to capital.”

“Your destination is Vestia then?” The receptionist pointed towards the fees written on the page and paused for a moment before continuing. “In that case, the fee will be 40,000 golde if you’re willing to ride with other passengers, or 120,000 golde if you’d like to reserve a carriage for yourself. The trip should take a total of around 10 days.”

“Expensive.” Fran’s one word comment referred to more than just the cash cost. She also meant that the trip would eat up far too much of our time. Seeing that Fran seemed rather confused, the receptionist showed her a map and began to explain the circumstances.

“This is where Greyseal is on the map. Vestia is right over here, to its west.”

“Not that far?”

Greyseal was on Chrom’s eastern coast. Vestia seemed like it was just a little to the west of it. I wasn’t able to make any definitive conclusions seeing as how the map was missing a scale, but it didn’t really look like it would take 10 days to move between the two relatively close points nonetheless.

Being as experienced as she was, the receptionist addressed all my concerns before I even voiced them.

“The straight line distance between the two cities isn’t too far, but you see this green patch?” She moved her finger over to the large green area right between Greyseal and Vestia.

“Scorpion Lion Forest?” Fran read the words aloud.

“Exactly. The Scorpion Lion Forest is designated as a C ranked haunt. Manticores, C ranked monsters, are known to live within it.”

*Oh, so that’s why people avoid going straight through the forest.*

There wasn’t any way the average person was going to be able to somehow manage to make their way through a C ranked haunt.

“The forest extends quite far, both to the north and to the south. The carriages have to go a rather long ways to loop around it,” the receptionist explained.

“No places to pass through?”

“It isn’t possible for a regular person, more skilled adventurers are known able to do it.”

“I’m an adventurer.”

“It does appear that way, but I don’t advise trying on your own.”

The receptionist was a really nice person. She seemed to think that Fran was a brand new adventurer, but she didn’t immediately shoot her down rudely, and instead phrased her statement in such a way to avoid injuring Fran’s pride. Moreover, she didn’t question whether or not Fran could afford a carriage ride, and simply continued to attentively answer all her questions regardless.

“Most adventurers setting off from Greyseal prefer passing through Argentlapn instead. The town’s fairly close to where the Scorpion Lion Forest is at its thinnest. You might be able to find yourself a party that’s looking to get through if you head over.”

In other words, we had two choices. The first was to loop around the Scorpion Lion forest by taking a huge detour. The second was to pass through it by heading over to Argentlapn. The haunt was apparently only ranked in at C. It likely wouldn’t give us too much trouble, so we would probably be much better off breaking through it..

That said, getting to Argentlapn was still a task in and of itself. The map made it seem like we could reach it so long as we headed in a south-westerly direction, but it probably wouldn’t be that simple in reality. The route undoubtedly had its own ups and downs, ones that a mere map wasn’t capable of illustrating.

“How much to Argentlapn?”

“It should take about a day. The cost is 3000 golde if you’re willing to ride with other people and 9000 if you want a private carriage.”

*“Riding a Horned Carriage sounds like a pretty good idea as far as I’m concerned. It’ll be much more difficult for us to get lost if we get ourselves one.”*

“Agreed, ” Fran responded telepathically.

We'd been curious about horned carriages to begin with, so we ended up booking one that would set out first thing tomorrow morning. We spent a good bit of time debating whether or not we wanted to ride a public carriage or rent one out ourselves and ultimately ended up choosing the first option over the second. Publicity was important, and riding with other people was a pretty good way to advertise Fran's status as an evolved Black Catkin.

"Do you have anything to serve as identification?"

"Adventurer's Guild card okay?"

"Of course."

"Then here."

"Thank yooouwahat! You're a C ranker!? Really!?" The receptionist's eyes widened as she looked over Fran's guild card. She flipped it over several times and examined it from all different angles before finally confirming its authenticity by scanning it with a sort of crystalline device.

"It's... the real thing?" She was clearly taken aback and impressed by Fran's ability.

"Nn. Real."

"R-Right! I should give this back to you. I'm terribly sorry if I came off as rude."

"No problem."

"So I hope you don't mind, but there's something I'd like to ask you, seeing as how you're a C ranked adventurer."

"Nn," Fran prompted the receptionist to continue with a nod.

"To be honest, we're in need of escorts. We can't seem to find enough to fill all our positions, so would you be okay with being a guard rather than a passenger? You're a C ranker, so we'd be willing to give you a 50% discount if you're willing to accept."

"Why not enough? City has lots of adventurers."

"Most of this city's adventurers focus primarily on escorting ships. That's all

the more true right now given the current state of international affairs.”

“Meaning?” Fran tilted her head in confusion.

“Oh, did you perhaps come to Greyseal by sea?”

“Nn.”

“Things have started to get a bit tense between us and the neighbouring country, in part because the king’s currently off abroad. Most of the soldiers have been assigned to the border. Very few have been left to perform the usual patrols.”

The lack of soldiers led to a proportional increase in the number of thieves and monsters. Many of the adventurers that normally worked escort jobs were busy exterminating all the vermin that’d arisen due to the lapse in the usual military presence.

“War going to happen?”

“I doubt it given the agreements our country has with the Kingdom of Bashar, but tensions are rising nonetheless. That would in part because the Basharians don’t really quite like Beastkin.”

At present, the beastkin’s country was relatively free of discrimination. It was a peaceful, relatively accepting country. However, it hadn’t always been that way in the past. Beastkin used to hold many social advantages. Most other races were discriminated against, and even oppressed if one was to go further back in time.

Bashar was a kingdom comprised precisely of these discriminated people. It was originally established by a group that had either escaped from or been driven out of the Beastkin’s country. To that end, the Basharians hated the beastkin. They instead advocated human supremacy and ensured that humans were given more leverage and opportunities.

“As a human, Bashar’s past makes me feel ashamed. The country used to proclaim that humans were the ultimate race and that beastkin were just inferior beings meant to be treated as slaves.”

“Explained using past tense. Different now?”

“The royal family’s non-extremist faction rose to power approximately a hundred years ago. Though the two countries have yet to get along, the Basharians have become much more tolerant of our country than ever before.”

Unfortunately, the two countries were still keeping an eye on each other. The Beastkin’s Country recognized that they were currently in a state that made it so that the Basharians wouldn’t actually be able to do much against them, especially with the king being as strong as he was, but they still couldn’t help but have their soldiers gather up upon learning that the Basharians had done the same—even though the Basharians had declared that they were only using their military might to clear a dungeon.

“And that’s why we’re a bit short on hands at the moment,” the receptionist concluded. “Would you be willing to take up the job and help us out?”

The 1.5k golde we would save was honestly just chump change for us, but the request was one that would officially go through the Adventurer’s Guild and add to our credit, so we figured there wasn’t really anything to lose.

“Will accept escort job to Argentlapn.”

“That’s great,” the receptionist smiled. “Is 6 in the morning a good time for you?”

“Nn. No problem.”

“Then we’ll see you then.”

*Woo. Transportation get.*

*“Alright. I guess we can just kick back and relax until tomorrow.”*

“First, eat all local specialties.”

*“There’s local specialties around here?”*

“Saw on sign just now.”

*“You’ve always been quick to notice that kind of stuff... But alright, let’s go check it out.”*

“Nn!”

## Chapter 264: A Journey Aboard a Horned Carriage

The horned carriage we were riding in rattled as it travelled down the highway at a pace a horse-pulled vehicle could never match. Its destination was, of course, Argentlapn, the town closest to the Scorpion Lion Woods' most traversable subsection. Although we were working as guards, we were basically acting in the same manner as would any other passenger. We wouldn't need to do anything unless we were subject to an attack.

A calm atmosphere filled the carriage's interior. It was a strange mix, one that was somehow both relaxing and festive at the same time.

"Would you like a snack, milady?" One of the passengers handed Fran a treat.

"Thanks," Fran gratefully accepted with a nod.

A second and third passenger soon imitated the first and offered Fran a couple treats, which again, she accepted. Her acknowledgement of their offerings caused the other passengers aboard the carriage to react with joy. Speaking of the other passengers, most of them were older, unevolved individuals well past their prime. It was precisely this status of theirs that caused them to view her as an idol to worship and pay her a near superfluous amount of respect. The fact that she was a black catkin, a member of a tribe known not to evolve, only amplified the admiration they held for her all the more.

In other words, the festive mood had stemmed from Fran's presence. She was being celebrated for allowing the older beastkin to breathe the same air as her. That said, they had given her too many offerings for her to hold; the many snacks presented to her ended up getting laid out in front of her.

The older individuals weren't the only ones aboard the coach. Some of the grandchildren were too. One would normally expect children to look upon the mound of snacks with greed or envy, but they weren't. Like their grandparents, they too were too busy idolizing Fran. As far as they were concerned, she was a hero. The combination of their grandparents' attitudes and their instincts as beastkin had deemed her as such.

Young, innocent sounding cries of “Evolving ish so cool!”, “I wanna be like Fuwan!”, and “Awesome!” filled the carriage as toddlers scrambled about and admired her.

Again, the atmosphere was peaceful and relaxing. But alas, it wasn’t to last.

“M-Monsters sighted!” The coachman shouted in panic as he spotted a group of enemies up ahead. The contents of his message caused the passengers to curl up in fear and direct their gazes towards Fran, as if begging for her to bring them salvation by resolving the situation.

“Milady, please! Eliminate the beasts!” The driver raised his voice again as he regained a bit of his composure.

“Nn. Got it,” Fran nodded as she stepped onto the coachman’s platform and looked ahead.

“T-Thank you very much!”

Ten odd german shepherd sized dog monsters looked to be waiting for us a bit down the road.

“Can’t just break through? Only around 10.”

“I-I’m sorry milady, but I’m ‘fraid that ain’t gonna be possible!” The coachman replied.

That wasn’t quite the response I was expecting. I knew that the dogs were monsters, but the Dual Horn was still the size of a god damned rhino. I assumed it would be able to just smash the dog like creatures out of its way and keep moving.

A bit of a closer examination revealed to me why I’d been wrong.

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## General Information

Species: Venom Dog

Dog type monster

Level: 11

HP: 33

MP: 13  
STR: 17  
VIT: 13  
AGI: 61  
INT: 8  
MGC: 14  
DEX: 12

### **Skills**

Pursuit: Lv 3  
Roar: Lv 1  
Enhanced Sense of Smell  
Magical Poison Fang

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The monsters were called Venom Dogs. Their stats were quite low, but they were capable of delivering toxic bites through the use of their agility. Moreover, they would then use that superior agility stat to kite their foe around until it succumbed to their venom. It was an effective strategy, and one even the Dual Horn was prone to falling victim to given the sheer number of Venom Dogs. There was, however, a fairly simple solution. All we needed to do was obliterate the enemies before they closed in on us.

“Don’t slow down,” Fran ordered the driver as she got into position and lifted me into a combat ready stance.

“A-Are you sure?”

“Nn. Just leave to me.”

“Y-Yes ma’am!” Though he seemed to lack confidence, the driver still ended up obeying Fran’s commands because she’d evolved and he hadn’t.

“*Alright, let’s do this!*” I telepathically shouted.

“Nn.”

Fran launched me towards the monsters as I boosted my velocity with telekinesis. The attack was swift; I pierced through two of our enemies’ cores and absorbed them with pinpoint accuracy. I then used a mix of wind magic and



sheer telekinetic force to prevent them from escaping before tearing through them one after another.

I grabbed their corpses and shoved them into my storage immediately after defeating them. Venom dogs were quite weak. They probably weren't worth too much, but I decided to loot them regardless, just in case.

The coachman seemed to want to say something about the fact that the monsters had vanished in an instant, corpses and all, but ended up rescinding his comment because he didn't want to spoil Fran's mood. He instead heaved a sigh of relief and thanked her, to which she responded by nodding lightly as she returned to the vehicle's interior. There, she found herself showered in shouts of gratitude and praise.

She responded to them one by one at first by stating that she hadn't done anything impressive, and that she was just doing her job, but was eventually overwhelmed by their enthusiasm and forced to retreat back to the coachman's seat.

She'd already fulfilled her duty and showed off just how strong black catkin could be, so there wasn't really any issue with her retreating. That said, she still made herself an excuse and stated that she was repositioning herself so she could better remain vigilant of any additional monsters.

"Haha, they sure have kicked up a fuss." The coachman smiled wryly. The passengers had been quite noisy, so he knew exactly what had just happened.

"Nn."

The only thing that followed her reply was silence. The driver recognized that there was a large rift between her social status and his own and thus, remained silent and didn't really try talking to her. That said, he didn't seem particularly bothered by the silence. He simply continued to look straight ahead and direct the dual horn along the road before him.

\*\*\*

And just like that, 4 hours flew right by.

"Town spotted," Fran commented as she awoke from a nap.

“You’ve got some really good eyes! We’re just about coming up on Argentlapn,” the driver replied, surprised.

It took a good bit of time, but we finally reached our destination. There was only a single group of monsters on the way. Fran didn’t really have much to do. The combination of her boredom and the vehicle’s gentle shaking caused her to end up napping atop the driver’s platform for most of the trip’s duration.

“Adventurers’ Guild in town?”

“A pretty big ‘un. It’s right by the town’s entrance, so you’ll prolly see it soon.”

Unlike Greyseal, Argentlapn lacked a space specifically intended for horned carriages. Our vehicle had ended up pulling up beside a stagecoach just outside town.

The passengers began to get off shortly after the vehicle reached its destination. They each thanked Fran and then the driver in that order as they left.

“Thank you!”

“We owe you our lives, milady!”

“Bai bai Fuwan!”

She responded to them with the usual “Nn,” before departing from the drop off area.

To be honest, having people treat us like that is kind of draining. It looks like we’re going to have to put up with it if we want to keep bolstering the Black Cat Tribe’s place in beastkin society though...

I felt the urge let out a mental groan as I entertained the thought, but was interrupted by Fran before I could.

“Master.”

*“What’s up?”*

“Tired...”

It looked like I wasn’t the only one. But still, it wasn’t really an issue. We were sure to grow accustomed to it in due time.

## Chapter 265: Argentlapn

We found Argentlapn's Adventures' Guild immediately after passing through the town's front gate.

The size of the guild was, like Greyseal's, quite impressive. This made me believe that all the Beastkin's Country's guilds were large, but apparently that was a misunderstanding. Us seeing two larger guilds in a row was just a coincidence. Greyseal was a portside city and Argentlapn was right by the best place one could pass through the Scorpion Lion Forest. As far as adventurers were concerned, both were hotspots.

『There seem to be a good number of adventurers hanging around.』

“Nn.”

Upon entering, we found more than 30 adventurers sitting around what looked like a bar and drinking booze.

All their gazes immediately flew right at Fran, evaluating her. Most were beastkin, so they immediately recognized Fran as someone who had evolved. The realization not only shocked them, but also eliminated any thoughts they had of harassing us. The reckless and ignorant adventurers that would've otherwise tried were immediately told to stand down by their buddies.

“W-Welcome.”

“Nn. Want to sell monster parts.”

“Sure thing. Could I please see your guild card?”

“Nn. C ranked adventurer. Fran.”

“I-I knew it...!”

The receptionist already knew who Fran was. The guild's intelligence network reached both far and wide and its employees were held to a high standard, so they were always kept in the loop. She soon realized that she'd been timidly staring at Fran's card, so she lightly cleared her throat before returning it.

“I-I'm sorry, please excuse me. We handle all monster related transactions

over there,” she said, pointing towards a table

“Got it.”

Fran brought out the corpses of the venom dogs she’d slain on her way over to the guild. They were not yet dismantled because we hadn’t had the time to get to it.

For some odd reason, the adventurers were riled up by her bounty.

*Wait, why do they seem so impressed? Venom dogs are only F ranked threats, aren’t they? How is killing 10 of them any bit of a big deal?*

Diving deeper into the conversation led me to understand the reasons for their admiration.

“That’s quite the number of venom dogs, miss,” said the guild’s receptionist, her eyes wide. “Did you perhaps encounter a pack?”

“Nn,” replied Fran.

“Wow, how impressive.. I should’ve expected nothing less.”

Venom dogs were quite difficult for weaker adventurers to handle because they had access to the Magic Poison Fang skill. Packs of 10 or more were considered especially dangerous and boosted their threat level up to E. In other words, one needed to be at least as strong as a D-ranker to handle a pack all by oneself.

It was obvious from looking at the corpses that Fran killed each one with a single blow, yet another testament to the extent of her skill.

“Meat edible?”

“It’s poisoned, so unfortunately not. But on the flip side, the guild is willing to buy any sort of poison, so we’ll be happy to take it off your hands regardless.”

The guild ended up paying us 5k Golde a pop. The price was that low because the monsters had yet to be dismantled and all were missing their cores. The 50k profit we got seemed like it would probably be about enough to cover the night’s lodging expenses.

“And here is your 50,000 Golde. Thank you for doing business with us,” said

the guild's receptionist, handing Fran a large bag of coins.

"Thanks," replied Fran. "Also, wanted to ask question."

"Please go right ahead."

"How to get to capital?"

"Give me just a second and I'll show you."

The receptionist pulled out a map of the surrounding area.

"The most important thing is knowing exactly where to go."

I looked at it and realized that we could enter the most narrow part of the Scorpion Lion Forest by heading south from where the town was located. It certainly did look like a good spot to use to break through.

"As I'm sure you've noticed already, this is where the forest is thinnest," she said, pointing to a spot on the map. "It only takes about a day to get out of the forest if you pass through here. The adventurers tend to call it 'The Shortcut.'"

"Got it. Chance of encountering manticore?"

"About one in one hundred."

"Seems low?" asked Fran, tilting her head.

"Manticores tend to avoid preying on adventurers if possible," explained the receptionist.

Weaker adventurers were easy prey, but the manticores would be overwhelmed if they ran into stronger adventurers. As a result, they believed attacking adventurers as risky and instead focused on the consumption of other monsters.

That said, some manticores would still attack adventures near The Shortcut. Those were either young and inexperienced, or desperate because they'd been driven out of their territory by stronger manticores.

"There's a road leading all the way to The Shortcut, so it should be quite easy to find."

Passing through the shortcut took one straight to the town of Roseraccoon, another large town bordering the Scorpion Lion Forest.

“While I do think you’d be perfectly fine on your own, you can find yourself a party if you so wish by checking the recruitment board over there.” She pointed towards a large wooden board behind Fran.

“Recruitment board?”

“Yes. Safety comes from one’s individual combat prowess, but can also come from numbers for those who are lacking.”

Partying up allowed you to take on stronger opponents by working together with other people also capable of putting up a fight. Moreover, it also allowed the possibility of escaping by sacrificing one’s companions in times of desperation.

That was why it was only natural for those that liked to solo or work in small groups to temporarily join up with each other and form slightly larger parties before attempting to move through the forest.

I, however, was against it. Partying up with people would only serve to slow us down.

“Hey there.”

“Nn? Hi?”

“You’re planning to head through the Scorpion Lion Forest, right? You wanna join us? We may not really look it, but we’re E-rankers, so we won’t slow you down or get in your way.”

A handsome looking human adventurer approached and called out to Fran right as she attempted to leave the guild.

I couldn’t help but feel a bit of suspicion with regards to his motives. I highly doubted a non-beastkin E ranker would be able to discern the extent of Fran’s might at a glance.

*That said, why was he going about assuming Fran **isn’t** a weakling?*

“Called out to me, why?”

“Well I mean, you’ve pretty much got everyone’s sights on you, and I just overheard something about you saying you were a C ranker.”

“You believed that?”

“Well, you beastkin tend to have higher stats than us humans, and a good portion of you tend to be able to hold your own in a fight. I met another young, but incredibly strong beastkin girl around your age the other day too, so I’m pretty confident that you’re a strong one.”

“I see.”

*Welp, don’t I feel like an asshole. He’d actually been wanting to party up with Fran and not trying to mess with her.*

That said, we ended up turning down his invitation because he wasn’t leaving until the day after tomorrow, and we couldn’t afford to just sit around and waste time with our schedule. Moreover, I’d been thinking that it was possible for us to just get on Urushi and fly over the forest. Though, that would eat through his mana, so I wanted to go as far as possible on foot first. Thus having companions wouldn’t quite work out with what we had in mind.

*“We should leave now.”*

“Nn.”

So, with that done, we thanked the receptionist and headed back out the front door.

*“It’s still morning, and we’ve still got the whole day ahead of us, so why don’t we head right over to The Shortcut?”*

“Think will encounter manticores?”

*“Why again do you seem like you’re looking forward to it...? Though, you’ve probably gone and jinxed it now, so I’d say we’re more or less sure to run into one.”*

“Can’t wait.”

# Chapter 266: Scorpion Lion Forest

The act of “jinxing” something, also known as “raising a flag”, has always been one that has both brought trouble and evoked fear. It has changed all sorts of destinies. It’s known for hooking up average losers with the hottest girls in school, brutally murdering loving fathers serving in the military, reversing all but guaranteed victories, and everything in between.

So you’re probably wondering where I’m going with this tangent and all.

“Garuooooohhh!”

*“Wasn’t there only supposed to be a 1% chance for us to run into a manticore?!”* I complained.

“Nn. Lucked out,” Fran happily replied.

*“More like this only happened ’cause you jinxed it!”*

We happened to encounter a 5 meter tall lion with a scorpion’s tail as we tried passing through The Shortcut.

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## General Information

Species: Manticore (Lion-type Monster)

Level: 31

HP: 398/819

MP: 81/196

STR: 201

VIT: 591

AGI: 350

INT: 203

MGC: 187

DEX: 267

## Skills

Sole Sense: Lv 1

Sharp Nose: Lv 6



Espionage: Lv 4  
Flame Breath: Lv 6  
Vigilance: Lv 4  
Harden: Lv 8  
Herculean Strength: Lv 5  
Shock Resistance: Lv 6  
Resistance to Abnormal Status: Lv 6  
Life Force Detection: Lv 4  
Claw Arts: Lv 9  
Claw Techniques: Lv 7  
Earth Magic: Lv 5  
Poison Spray: Lv 6  
Tail Strike: Lv 9  
Fire Magic: Lv 4  
Physical Barrier: Lv 7  
Roar: Lv 5  
Night Vision  
Vigour Manipulation  
Reinforced Fur  
Magic Poison Fang

**Description:** A monster that resembles a lion with a scorpion's tail. Its rank is justified by its defensive prowess as it's offensive stats tend to be relatively lackluster. It is quite easy to combat so long as you take note of its tail. Its core is located within its heart. Threat level: C.

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The manticore's stats seemed reasonable and rather fitting given its rank. That is, it was about as strong as all the other C ranked monsters we'd fought to date. As indicated by its description, its skills were mostly centered around bolstering its defenses.

That said, it had both Magic Poison Fang and Herculean Strength, so its ability to attack wasn't something to be underestimated.

Or at least that would've been the case if we'd run into it when it was in perfect condition.

“Dying?” asked Fran, as she tilted her head.

*“Not quite. It’s health and mana are both sitting at about half.”*

The manticore had deep wounds carved all over its body. The guild had said that younger manticores and manticores that’d been kicked out of their territory were the only two types that adventurers would normally encounter on The Shortcut.

The one we were staring down seemed to belong to the latter of the two categories. Its right leg had a deep gash in it and its right eye had a cut that seemed to render it useless. Its ever important tail had been torn down the middle and was missing its upper half, stinger and all.

“Nn.”

“Grooooowl!”

It seemed to have sensed Fran’s strength, as its back was arched like an aggravated housecat. Its injured leg had prevented it from running away, so it instead chose to ready itself to engage her in combat.

*“Alright. Let’s get ourselves some exp and loot its corpse once we’re done.”*

“Nn!” Fran nodded, excited at the prospect of combat.

*“Stay on guard, Urushi. Whatever almost killed our manticore friend here might still be nearby.”*

“Woof!” Urushi replied reliably.

*“Let’s go, Fran!”*

“Nn! Awakening!”

The manticore’s defenses were focused towards physical resistance as opposed to magical resistance. To that end, I was going to be taking charge of our offensive efforts; Fran’s capacity for magic fell behind my own.

Fran was going to be focused on defense. She awakened in order to make it easier to avoid the enemy’s attacks by using her perception-type skills in tandem with her boosted dex stat. She’d be using her Sword Lord Arts and Perfect Barrier to parry and mitigate anything she couldn’t dodge. Though I was

going to be focused on attacking, that wasn't all. I was also preparing a teleportation spell just in case we ever needed to escape.

"Graaaaaaohhhh!" the manticore roared as it lunged towards Fran.

"Fmph," Fran grunted as she dodged the manticore's strike and took to its rear.

*"Sweet! It looks like you've got us into a pretty good position. Thunderbolt! Thunderbolt!!"*

"Gyaaaaaoooooooo!" the beast howled as the magical projectiles drove themselves into its body.

Lightning Magic's biggest perk was the crowd-control type effect that came with its damage. The paralyzing bolts slowed its limbs and allowed us to better avoid its strikes.

"Nn! Effective!"

*"Yeah! Let's keep this up till it dies!"*

We continued to fire off spells. We probably could've opened with Kanna Kamui or even Thor's Hammer and just straight up won, but, we didn't want to blow up the monster's core by spamming spells with too much power.

Thus we whittled our foe down with medium powered spells instead.

*"Lightning Blast! Lightning Blast!!"*

I called them medium powered, but that was only because I was used to casting the two other spells I'd just mentioned. Truth be told, the spells I was casting were probably considered high powered given that they could hurt C ranked monsters.

Another four blasts of lightning caused the manticore to die.

"...Dead?" Fran narrowed her eyes, still on guard.

*"Oh god damn it Fran! You're jinxing things again!"* I groaned.

"Nn?"

Fortunately, we were fine this time around. The manticore was actually dead.

It didn't get back up and attack. I pierced through its corpse and absorbed its core.

*"It's been a while since I've last absorbed anything this strong."*

My mood improved as I felt the manticore's magical energy flow into me. I ended up gaining a whole 200 monster core points worth of value from it, which was a lot more than I imagined. I almost wanted to run into another manticore now.

Unfortunately, it didn't seem like there were any other manticores nearby. They weren't the kind of monster one encountered regularly.

"Grr!" Urushi let out a low growl to warn us of an incoming entity.

"Something coming...!"

Likewise, Fran's ears twitched as she picked up on the individual the wolf had detected.

*"Whatever it is has got quite a bit of magical energy."*

The thing coming towards us had about the same amount of magical energy as a manticore, but it wasn't one. Whatever it was, it was approaching incredibly quickly.

And it wasn't alone. There was what seemed to be one of its allies following behind it as well. If they were monsters, it was possible that they were the type that hunted in pairs.

*"I'll get us ready to teleport the hell out if need be."*

"Nn."

Fran kept her guard up and took a combat ready stance with me in hand as she awaited the incoming pair. But both she and I were taken aback regardless.

"What impudence! I have been robbed of my prey!"

A young girl that looked to be only the slightest bit older than Fran complained as sprang from the bushes. Her voice carried with it the sort of tone one would expect from a highborn.

She was pretty. She was really pretty. Her beauty was of such importance that I had to say it twice. Twice! [1]

Her hair was cut rather short, but curled inwards at the ends. Her eyebrows were thick, but not too long horizontally. They almost seemed a bit like the kind you'd see in Imperial, historical Japanese courts if you looked at her from afar. When combined with her big forehead, it made her give off a youthful charm. Both her hair and the ears that adorned her head were a platinum blonde while her skin was white as snow.

Her deep, crimson eyes clearly stood out from the rest of her visage. They were big, round, and carried within them all the girl's obstinacy and determination. The sheer strength of her gaze was more than enough to draw attention to her.

Furthermore, her eyes weren't the only thing that contrasted with her skin and hair; her armour did too. It was like her opposite: everything she wore was dyed in black. Her metal armour was ornamented all over with gold, giving her an air that was magnanimous and threatening. I couldn't help but feel like it was too over the top for a child to wear, but for some odd reason it seemed to suit her nonetheless.

I could tell at a glance that she was a beastkin, but I had no way of knowing what race she was in particular. I appraised her, given that it was only natural in our current circumstances, but I wasn't able to get anything out of it. She must've had a skill or item powerful enough to totally ward off the effects of even my Eye of Empyrea.

I instead had to rely on using my experiences to discern that she was some sort of cat-related beastkin.

*"I can't appraise her, so I can't say for sure, but it looks like she's probably a White Catkin or something,"* I pondered.

*"White Catkin. Doesn't exist,"* Fran telepathically replied.

*"Shit, seriously?"*

*"Nn. Know all catkin types since also catkin. No white."*

*"Right..."*

Wait, so what is she then? Is she not a cat? Nah, she has to be a cat based on how her ears and tail look. Maybe she's like a White Pantherkin or White Tigerkin or something, assuming they exist?

*"Not evolved yet,"* she remarked conclusively.

*"Huh. Well then..."*

*"Nn... But strange. Can't tell species."*

She could not only stop me from appraising her, but also somehow had the ability to prevent other beastkin from figuring out her precise species.

The girl briskly walked towards us as I found myself lost in thought. She was giving off an extremely hostile aura, but not the murderous kind. We decided to take a wait-and-see approach and hear her out for the time being. That said, we weren't going to let her approach us any more than she already had.

"Stop there," Fran narrowed her eyes as she issued a warning.

"...I need not for you to tell me that," the other girl replied.

Much to my surprise, she stopped right where we told her to. Thinking about it, I realized it made sense. There was no reason for her to step within range of our attacks.

That action alone was more than enough to inform me that the girl was a skilled fighter. With a single glance she had not only discerned that Fran was strong, but also accurately estimated her effective range.

Her eyes widened as she took a second look at Fran. I couldn't tell whether it was because she'd realized Fran was the Black Lightning Princess, or if it was simply because she was an evolved Black Catkin.

I wanted Fran to ask her who she was, but that had to wait. There were more important issues to be addressed.

"Approaching person, your party member?"

"Indeed."

A second individual emerged from a bush behind the girl as she answered Fran's question.

“Please don’t rush on ahead of me, my lady,” the individual rebuked.

A wave of shock coursed through my brain the moment I saw her. The sheer impact I felt was on par with the one I’d felt when I saw the Leviathan just the other day.

I was so surprised I couldn’t stop myself from muttering under my breath.

*“Is that... a maid...?”*

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[1] Shitty meme. “If something’s important, you say it twice!”

## Chapter 267: Mare and Kuina

The individual that had pushed her way through the bushes was undoubtedly a maid. Wait. Weren't we supposed to be in the midst of a haunt containing C ranked monsters? The hell is a maid doing here? If there was a limit to how out of place one could possibly be, then this maid had just exceeded the hell out of it.

Her being a maid wasn't really the part that surprised me the most. I'd already met many maids post reincarnation.

I was as surprised as I was because the maid before me was a whole cut above the rest. She wasn't wearing the traditional servant wear one normally saw on the maids around these parts. Rather, she wore a less sexualized version of the frilly, lacy, gothic-lolita style dress you'd typically see in anime and manga. Her clothes clearly put cuteness well above functionality.

The dress, whose main colours were white and navy, came with an equally fancy apron attached to it. The bottom part of the dress extended almost all the way towards the ground. It gave her a really prim and proper kinda feel, which *really* got me going. The girl wearing the maid uniform had a well proportioned figure and clear body lines. Her curves reminded me greatly of Fujiko's. [1] Moreover, her eyes made her seem cold. She was just the type of maid I liked. Her long chestnut hair was styled into three distinct braids. Her long bangs had been pushed aside to put her forehead on display.

Her nose was decorated with a pair of thick-lensed glasses. They were heavy, and if you looked at her straight on, it almost looked like they were falling off her face.

*Man, round glasses are the best.*

There was no doubt in my mind that her glasses were sexy as hell. Her ears were black and resembled those of a horse's. They were a bit difficult to see, in part because of the brim she was wearing and in part because they'd been pushed back such that they blended in with her hair. At first, I'd thought that they were just accessories.



Unlike her companion, the maid could actually be appraised.

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**General Information**

Name: Kuina  
Age: 29  
Species: Beastkin (Grey Tapirkin / Phantom Dream Tapirkin)  
Class: First Class Maid  
Status Level: 49/99  
HP: 539  
MP: 651  
STR: 297  
VIT: 230  
AGI: 231  
INT: 333  
MGC: 311  
DEX: 336

**Skills**

Assassination: Lv 7  
Espionage: Lv 8  
Healing Magic: MAX  
Recovery Magic: Lv 4  
Court Etiquette: Lv 6  
Presence Detection: Lv 4  
Presence Concealment: Lv 8  
Illusion Magic: MAX  
Greater Illusion Magic: Lv 2  
Restrain: Lv 6  
Sewing: Lv 7  
Murderous Intent Detection: Lv 8  
Silenced Action: Lv 7  
Purification Magic: Lv 4  
Resistance to Abnormal Status: Lv 6  
Interrogation: Lv 7

Resistance to Mental Abnormalities: Lv 8

Laundry: Lv 8

Cleaning: MAX

Throwing Arts: Lv 9

Throwing Techniques: Lv 8

Knowledge of Poisons: Lv 8

Poison Perception: Lv 8

Magic Resist: Lv 4

Magic Perception: Lv 6

Magic Absorption: Lv 6

Water Magic: Lv 5

Cooking: Lv 8

Alchemy: Lv 4

Ignore Pain

Iron Will

Magic Mastery

### **Innate Skills**

Awakening

A Maid's Prudence

Phantom Dream Matrix

### **Titles**

Assassin Killer

Illusion Mage

One That has Experienced and Surpassed Hell

Lord of Cleaning

Royal Maid

### **Equipment**

Divine Silk Maid's Uniform

Divine Silk Gloves

Ring of Sorcery

Illusion Sealing Bracelet

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She was pretty strong, seeing as how she'd evolved. She looked like she was

more than fit for combat, or rather assassination, even though she was a maid.

Classifying her in adventurer terms, she was at least as strong as a B ranker. I wouldn't be surprised if she were an A ranker either, given that I had no idea how large the powerboost she'd get from awakening was.

"My lady, I've told you time and time again to slow down. I can't keep up with you, and it's dangerous for you to dash on ahead of me," rebuked the maid.

"I do apologize, Kuina. Chasing down my prey caused me to lose myself," replied the little girl.

"And who might this newfound acquaintance of yours be?"

The maid, Kuina, turned her eyes in Fran's direction. Her gaze remained cold, but it didn't seem like she was judging Fran. Instead, it seemed more like she was simply sleepy, but at the same time, she gave off a mysterious feel. The lack of emotion within made it difficult to guess her thoughts. Her eyes were similar to Fran's, but gave the impression that she had even less interest in other people.

In fact, she didn't seem surprised even though she'd stared Fran down. Of all the beastkin we met she gave the smallest reaction to Fran's evolution.

"That... is surprising, so much so that I almost tripped and fell," the maid remarked.

"Indeed. Never before have I seen your face decorated with such a deep expression of surprise."

Apparently, she was not actually uninterested in Fran. Her emotions just didn't show on her face. I was honestly impressed that her companion was even capable of discerning her emotions, let alone their intensity.

"You, name yourself!" the silver haired girl commanded.

I wanted Fran tell her that it was rude to ask another's name without first providing one's own, but—

"Rather, it would be more appropriate for me to provide my own name first. I am Mare, and I allow you to refer to me as such!" the girl that had named herself Mare declared in an imposing, self-important tone.

“And I’m Kuina. Nice to meet you.”

Mare placed both hands on her hips and took a proud stance as she declared herself, whereas Kuina instead performed a clean, crisp bow as she gave her name. They seemed really disorganized given the disparity between the manner in which they introduced themselves, but didn’t really come off as bad people nonetheless.

“C ranked adventurer, Fran. This, Urushi,” Fran replied in her usual tone. She was clearly undaunted.

“Woof!”

“Fran...? So you really are the Black Lightning Princess,” Mare nodded, as if to confirm her own suspicions.

“Nn.”

She knew about the Black Lightning Princess. So wait, does that mean she’s an adventurer? She’s got a maid though, so she’s probably not... Is she a merchant or something? No, that doesn’t seem quite right...

“I never would have thought that we would meet you under circumstances like these,” said Kuina. “I would have liked us to meet in a more peaceful environment.”

“That reminds me! How dare you rob me of my prey!?” exclaimed Mare, outraged.

“Prey?”

“I am speaking of the manticore that you slew! I was in the midst of hunting it down. You snatched the most enjoyable part of the hunt from right under my nose!” Mare shouted indignantly as she pointed towards the roasted manticore corpse lying right by us. Apparently, the manticore hadn’t been in our way because it’d lost its territory but rather because it had chosen to flee from Mare and her maid.

Under normal circumstances, my first reaction would be to accuse Mare of bullshitting, but I was pretty sure that she and Kuina would be able to handle a manticore without issue.

There was no debating that we'd stolen their kill. But at the same time, it was also their fault for letting their prey run from them in the first place. Still, we would've likely also began complaining if we were in their shoes.

*"I'd prefer not turning this into any sort of major conflict if possible. What say you, Fran?"*

*"Nn...? Can just give manticore?"* she replied nonchalantly.

*"You sure?"*

*"Don't mind."*

I personally had no problem giving them the materials if it meant avoiding conflict. The only issue would be that I've already absorbed the core. Cores were valuable to adventurers, and given that there was obviously no way we could've possibly sold it already, I wasn't sure we were going to be able to talk our way through the current circumstances.

"Then can give you manticore materials," offered Fran.

"Keep them. I need them not." Mare flatly rejected her.

"My lady, I beg you to reconsider," interjected Kuina. "We do require them given our funds are beginning to run dry."

"...I do admit that there is no harm in procuring them. However, they are but an extra. I was more interested in the slaying of the manticore and the experience I would gain, as I am quite close to leveling up." Mare complained.

Oh, so they were grinding. That made sense. If Mare was anywhere near as strong as Kuina, then she'd need to defeat something at least as strong as a manticore if she wanted to gain any significant amount of experience.

"Your fault. Let prey escape," pointed out Fran.

Mare grumbled in dissatisfaction, her face scrunching up.

"I believe the Black Lightning Princess is in the right here, My Lady," Kuina noted.

"...I understand," Mare relented. "...But I won't forgive you lest you engage me in a spar!"

Again, Mare spoke in a cocky, self-important tone, but I didn't mind it. At first I thought it was because of how pretty she looked, but Fran felt the same way I did, so that probably wasn't it. Mysteriously, Fran didn't feel repulsed by it like she often did when other nobles did the same.

Was it just because her cuteness seemed to overrule her stubbornness? Or because her pride almost seemed a natural fit for her? Of course, I don't feel the urge to suddenly kneel before her and obey her every whim, but I did feel like nodding along and agreeing was the natural thing to do.

"Interested," said Fran.

"I'm not sure that's a request you would typically spring on someone so suddenly, My Lady," Kuina remarked.

"A duel with the famous Black Lightning Princess," said Mare, ignoring her maid, "should more than suffice to make up for the loss of the manticore. What say you, Black Lightning Princess?"

I didn't even need to hear Fran's answer to know exactly what she was thinking. Her eyes were blazing in a way that they only ever did when she was in battle mode. It was completely self-evident that she was going to comply with Mare's request.

"Got it."

"A splendid response!" said Mare, happily. "Let us find a more convenient place to spar. This area is not exactly what I would claim the most suitable."

"Nn!"

Oh well, I guess it's fine. Neither Kuina or Mare had lied, and neither was giving off the impression that they wanted to kill her, so why not.

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[1] [Lupin III](#) reference.

## Chapter 268: Dueling Mare

We followed Mare and Kuina out the Scorpion Lion Forest so Fran could spar with Mare. Our party was so strong we instantly obliterated all the goblins and other weaker creatures we encountered on sight. Mare and Fran would immediately charge at any unfortunate monsters they could find. They competed for kills so intensely that I felt not even a manticore could survive a hit from the two combined.

We negotiated to keep all the cores of the monsters defeated along the way and relinquished all the remaining materials to Mare and Kuina. They didn't particularly mind since all they really wanted was money. Kuina was responsible for transporting all the monsters we defeated. She put the materials into an interesting sort of item bag. It had a small opening, but would suck things inside and had no issues storing things larger than it.

The two catkin chattered and debated their favourite foods as they walked. Kuina, on the other hand, mostly stayed silent. She instead focused on examining the surroundings for any potential danger. Her ears would move about and occasionally twitch. It really was hard to read her expressions though. I couldn't tell what she was thinking at all.

We journeyed through the Scorpion Lion Forest effectively unhindered, taking about two hours to pass through it. Exiting the forest, we found ourselves greeted by a wide, open plain.

"Shall we begin!?" Mare suggested.

"Nn!" said Fran as she reached for my hilt.

The two warriors, both exhilarated by the idea of a spar, turned to face each other as they prepared to draw their weapons—only to be interrupted.

"Stop right there," said Kuina as she grabbed onto Mare's head with an iron-claw grip.

"What now!?" shouted Mare.

“You’ll bother everyone else that wishes to use this route should you two spar right here” said Kuina, adjusting the rim of her glasses with her free hand. “Please move a bit further into the plains so you won’t be in anyone’s way.”

I had to admit, she had a point. I highly doubted that the duel would end with just a clash of blades. The two would likely destroy the road if we did not relocate.

And so we continued walking for another ten minutes and stopped once we were sure that there was nothing important nearby.

“Okay, this will suffice,” said Kuina. “Remember two things: do not kill each other, and do not awaken.”

“That much is obvious!” Mare complained.

“Nn!”

“But you needn’t hold back *too* much. I can heal both of you even if you bring each other to the verge of death.”

Mare laughed. “I can hardly wait! This will truly be a test of my skill!”

“Same.”

“Will that wolf be joining you in combat? I mind not if it participates.”

“Numerical advantage?”

“That is not a concern.” Mare drew the blade she carried on her back, raised it to the sky, and shouted, “Llinde!”

A red light radiated from its blade and from that light materialized a dragon.

“Kyuoohhh!”

“Cute,” was Fran’s first response.

It was fairly small, but a dragon nonetheless. If I had to guess, I would assume it to be a child.

“Monster Weapon?”

“Nuhahaha! Amazing, is it not?” replied Mare. “My sword is none other than Llinde, the Dragonblade!”



Mare’s ability to block me from appraising her didn’t apply to her sword. I was able to appraise both it and the dragon that had emerged from it.

---

**General Stats**

Name: Dragonblade Llinde  
Attack: 963  
MP: 669  
Durability: 887  
Magical Conductivity: B+

**Skills**

Flame Resistance  
Self-Repair  
Summon Dragonsoul

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T-The fuck, that thing is strong! Hell, it has even more attack than I do! And it’s a Monster Weapon to boot? Shit, I mean it’s not as impressive as a Godblade, but it was still without a doubt a high class magic sword.

B-But I’m still *totally* the better weapon. I-I have skills and stuff. I-I’m definitely not worse j-just because it’s got a dragon.

---

**General Information**

Name: Llinde  
Species: Dragon (Dragonsoul)  
Status:  
HP: 887  
MP: 669  
STR: 120  
VIT: 100  
AGI: 300  
INT: 200  
MGC: 400  
DEX: 100

**Skills**

Flame Breath: Lv 6

Fang Techniques: Lv 4

Fang Arts: Lv 5

Presence Detection: Lv 4

Regeneration: Lv 5

Resistance to Abnormal Status: Lv 5

Resistance to Mental Abnormalities: Lv 5

Charge: Lv 6

Heat Detection: Lv 5

Flight: Lv 8

Fire Magic: Lv 5

Roar: Lv 4

Dragon Magic: Lv 5

Reinforced Scales

Flame Nullification

Magic Manipulation

**Unique Skills**

Principle of Flame: Lv 6 [1]

**Description:** N/A

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The reason the dragon lacked a description was likely because it was associated with the blade and lived within it. That aside, it was decently strong. It wasn't a match for Urushi, but it was powerful enough to be considered a D ranked threat. Its unique skill apparently allowed it to manipulate any flames in its vicinity.

“Llinde here will take that wolf of yours on.”

“Got it,” said Fran. “Urushi, no losing.”

“Woof!”

“The very same applies to you, Llinde! Show them what it means to have a dragon’s pride!”

“Kyuooohhh!”

“This is a spar, so no hard feelings from either of you regardless of the outcome,” said Kuina. “Do I make myself clear?”

“Naturally,” Mare affirmed.

“Nn”

And so, the two began their duel. They did not immediately charge at each other right out of the gate. The match began with neither fighter willing to make the first move.

The two instead stared each other down with their blades raised. They made only the slightest of feints to keep each other in check. The moment I thought the two would be forever stuck in a deadlock, Mare suddenly charged.

“Haaaahhh!”

“Fmph!”

The sharp ring of steel on steel echoed throughout the plains as the two young girls let loose their battlecries.

Mare was quite the swordsman. She was able to cross blades with Fran and hold her ground through a short exchange of blows. But unfortunately for her, Fran held the Sword Lord Arts skill, which gave her the edge and allowed her to gradually overwhelm her foe through sheer technique.

“Hahahah! Impressive, Black Lightning Princess! I expect no less from a tribe whose name has been carved into legend!”

“Also impressed. Not bad.”

“Frustrating as it is, I must admit that my skill fails to surpass your own. I’ve no choice but to up the ante.”

“Bring it on!”

The two seemed to be getting along; they somehow found the time to trade words despite being engaged in a furious exchange of blows.

Mare attacked Fran with flame magic, but the black catkin managed to ward off her spell through the use of just her sword and a barrier before returning

fire with spells of her own. Fran was the more agile type of fighter, so her attacks came in the form of a relentless barrage. On the other hand, Mare was more a strength type. She launched fewer attacks, but each was much more powerful. The two girls smiled as they unhesitantly launched attacks that each carried lethal force. It was clear that both did not want to yield to the other.

Some of Mare's flame-based attacks would come without any chants. I couldn't tell if these attacks were magical spells or if they were instead a trait of her species. I suspected it was the latter, but at the same time I highly doubted it. She was too white to be a Red Catkin, after all.

Thinking about Red Catkin, I remembered that the Beast Lord had once mentioned that he had a daughter, but I highly doubted said daughter would be gallivanting around doing adventurer-like things with a maid by her side...

*Wait... that does seem possible seeing as how the Beast Lord is who he is...*

I looked towards Urushi and his foe.

"Grrr!"

"Kyuuoooh!"

The wolf and dragon were engaged in a high speed battle. The two were using the wide open space they were given to its fullest, trying to chase each other down without being caught. I couldn't help but be surprised at Llinde's speed. It could generate bursts of speed that exceeded Urushi at his fastest even though the latter had a higher agility stat.

Of course, its ability to fly contributed in part to its speed, but the bigger part seemed to be attributed to the flames that would trail behind it whenever it accelerated. It seemed to be using something similar to the Burnia spell. [2]

That said, speed was the only thing the dragonling had on Urushi. The wolf was superior in every other category. He held the advantage from start to end even though he was holding back. I was pretty sure he'd eventually win if I just left him be, so I turned my attention back over to Fran.

She and Mare were still happily exchanging blows, but the winner was already clear. Mare had substantial wounds all over, but Fran had only suffered a few light scratches. Mare's hands were tied. Fran was both the better swordsman

and the better mage of the two. There was simply nothing she could do.

Realizing that, Mare used her flame magic to create an opening and distanced herself from her opponent. It seemed that she still had something up her sleeve. Fran defended against the spell, and had more than enough liberty to pursue, but stood her ground. She wanted to see what Mare was planning to do.

Mare's eyes were filled with exhilaration. The battle was giving her an adrenaline rush, one that caused her to raise her voice and loose a bestial howl.

"...Coming."

A massive amount of magical energy began gathering within Mare's body. There was so much of it that it caused the air around her to begin crackling with energy. Was she awakening? Or maybe using some other skill?

I couldn't tell. I only knew that she was trying something big, so I focused my attention on her in hopes of figuring out exactly what it was.

Fran's expression was identical to Mare's. She was excited to see what would happen next, to see the challenge she would have to overcome—but it didn't. Something appeared behind Mare and caused the magical energy she started building up to disperse.

"Ngayaaah!"

"Geez. Were you seriously about to go ahead and do *that*, My Lady?"

"K-Kuina..."

Kuina had suddenly appeared behind Mare and dumped a large volume of magically created water over her head. The sudden wetness caused the startled catkin to scream and leap before turning back towards Kuina with a resentful gaze.

Naturally, I had picked up on Kuina's actions ahead of time. I had my guard up against her just in case. She'd suddenly disappeared using what I assumed to be illusion magic, but I did not mind it because she directed her next actions towards Mare and not Fran. Fran had also picked up on the maid's movements. Mare, however, didn't. All her focus had been directed towards Fran.

"And what exactly did I say about attempting to kill your opponent, My

Lady?”

“B-But I was going to lose if I did not attempt drastic measures...” whimpered Mare.

“And why exactly are you being so obstinate about winning or losing a spar?”

“Mmph...”

“Well?”

“V-Very well, I apologize!”

And so, that was how the spar ended with the pair apologizing to Fran. She was a bit disappointed with how things ended, but still decently satisfied, so she ended up letting things be. It was a good place to call it quits. Fran was starting to get hot headed as well. We managed to avoid having her and Mare actually try to kill each other, so this was probably as well as things could’ve possibly ended.

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[1] Lit. Principle of fire manipulation, but that sounds lame af

[2] Recall, this is the spell that Fran uses to accelerate.

## Chapter 269: The Princess

“Next time I will surely win! You wait and see!”

“Kyuuiii!”

With those parting words we separated from Mare and Kuina and made our way towards the town of Roserraccoon. We asked them to come with us but they declined. For some reason the two of them wanted to avoid the town. Maybe they were involved in some sort of incident? Regardless we decided to let matters be and head towards the town ourselves.

*“They were surely a lively pair.”*

“Nn. Will win next time.”

“Woof!”

“Nn. Both of us.”

Our encounter was definitely a fruitful one. I got to see a hella gorgeous maid and Fran met Mare, the first person in her age group capable of putting up a good fight. We won the spar, and Mare didn't seem like the type of fighter to pull her punches, but I wasn't certain we would have won a serious death match. She was clearly holding onto some final trump card at the end. This fight will definitely encourage Fran's growth as a warrior down the future. My only worry is that she may become too much of a battle junkie.

After walking for a distance, we spotted walls rising out of the horizon.

“Master, town spotted.”

*“Yeah and it's pretty big too. The walls are impressive. This is probably Roserraccoon.”*

“Nn.”

As we approached the town we noticed a commotion outside the walls. Although it wasn't strange for a town as large as this to be noisy, it was strange to see so many people milling around outside the walls. As we approached we saw that all the people were adventurers. There were about thirty of them, all trying to board the same horned carriage. Fran called out to one of the

adventurers.

“Something happen?”

“Hah? The hell do ya want ki– WHOA HOLY SHIT!”

The man took a glance at Fran and cut himself short. He froze, one foot on the horned carriage, the other still on the ground, his eyes bulging out of their sockets.

“Well?”

“My ba-” he coughed. “My apologies.”

He clearly cleaned up his act the moment he saw Fran. He probably realized she evolved.

“Okay?” asked Fran.

“Yes,” he said. “We’re currently tasked with escorting a noble. Our destination is a town down south.”

“Adventurers for guards? Not soldiers?”

“Yeah. All the knights and soldiers are headed to the border. There aren’t any to spare.”

“Understood.”

It seems there were some extenuating circumstances in this case. Normally a noble will be escorted by knights and soldiers unless they wanted to travel incognito. In that case they would hire adventurers as escorts, but having a full entourage of thirty people was antithetical to staying under the radar. I urged Fran to continue questioning.

“So many people, cause trouble?” asked Fran.

“Well this amount is to be expected given we are escorting the princess herself,” he said.

“Princess, here?”

“Yeah. The guildmaster decided to go over the top with this escort commission.”

It seemed the guildmaster was trying to please the royal family by sending the princess a large group of guards.

“In fact you can see her over there,” the adventurer said.



We looked over towards the direction he indicated. There stood a girl in a very ostentatious, out of place dress.

*Maybe we should go talk to her... We are pretty heavily indebted to the Beast Lord, after all.*

That said her entourage was giving the surroundings quite the stink-eye.

*"What do?"* asked Fran telepathically.

*"We might as well get closer and check things out."* I said.

*"Nn."*

Fran thanked the adventurer and we headed towards the princess. As we approached we suddenly felt something terribly wrong. A chill ran down our spines. It felt similar to when we were made subject to Coerced Camaraderie in Ulmutt. But maybe not that specifically. Were we appraised by the princess' guards? Probably not since the sensation was very brief.

*"Fran back off a bit."*

*"Nn."*

We backed away about twenty meters and the offputting sensation disappeared. I then used magic perception and found some sort of active skill covering the entirety of the princess' surroundings. I decided to try appraising the situation. I had to be very careful in case one of the guards had appraisal detection, I didn't want Fran to be accused of a serious breach of privacy. It's best to stay out of trouble.

I first made a copy of myself while still hiding behind Fran. I switched places with that copy so it looked like I was still on Fran's back. Then I shrunk all the way down to about the size of a ping pong ball. Finally I teleported to right above the princess. Making myself smaller was harder than making myself larger, so I probably couldn't keep this form for long. I recalled what Kuina did and made an illusion to blend into the sky behind me. I was able to get an appraisal but what I saw was really odd.

\*\*\*

## **General Information**

Name: Nemea Narasimha

Age: 16  
Species: Red Catkin/Golden Lionkin  
Class: Swordsman  
Status Level: 45/99  
HP: 198  
MP: 129  
STR: 181  
VIT: 188  
AGI: 202  
INT: 147  
MGC: 189  
DEX: 110

**Skills**

(Acting: Lv 7)  
Singing: Lv 5  
Court Etiquette: Lv 6  
Presence Detection: Lv 5  
Sword Techniques: Lv 5  
Sword Arts: Lv 5  
Shield Techniques: Lv 2  
Shield Arts: Lv 4  
Poison Perception: Lv 4  
Fire Magic: Lv 5  
Dancing: Lv 5

**Innate Skills**

Awakening

**Titles**

Princess (Royal Guard)

**Equipment**

Divine Silk Dress  
Appraisal Disguise Ring  
Bracelet of Substitution

Why the hell is there some stuff in parenthesis? There's a bunch of notable stuff like acting, royal guard, and even an appraisal disguise ring. Is the stuff in parenthesis things that are disguised that my max appraisal and Eye of Empyrea can see through? I can't be certain since there might be stuff hidden behind an even stronger layer of disguise. Another confusing part is the "Princess (Royal Guard)". I can't tell if it means a guard of royal blood or a guard that specifically attends a person of royalty. I wanted to investigate further but appraisal disguise obscured any further details.

Either way, the princess looked really weak considering she was *that* Beast Lord's daughter. Though, I guess it's a bit unfair to compare her to someone that's S ranked. Besides, she's actually pretty good for a sixteen year old. The only real issue I saw was that her skill levels were low compared to her status level. Maybe someone carried the hell out of her? I highly doubted that the Beast Lord would powerlevel his daughter but that was the only way to explain the discrepancy.

*Wait! Wasn't she supposed to be fifteen? Did her birthday just pass?*

I concluded that the source of my malaise was the appraisal disguise ring. She probably was not someone too suspicious given that the guildmaster was showing her out. Appraising some people around her, I found them to be court ladies and attendants so that made things seem even more legitimate. There likely wasn't any danger in approaching her.

I slowly made my way back to Fran.

*"Looks like we're in the clear. We can go greet her"*

*"Nn. Got it"* she replied.

Since there currently was only one evolved black catkin and it was well known that it was a little girl, they should instead realize she was Fran. The Black Lightning Princess nickname was a good as identification and provided us a decent social standing in these parts.

We approached the princess and this time got close enough for her to notice us.

*"Oh. Are you perhaps the Black Lightning Princess?"* she asked.

*"Nn."*

“Oi watch your mouth!” a guard shouted. “You are to address Her Highness with respect!”

Apparently he didn’t like how curtly Fran responded. But the princess reproached her guard.

“Stand down!” she said. “Do you recall that my father specifically ordered us to receive her graciously?”

Apparently the Beast Lord already arranged for stuff ahead of time. Shiet, thanks dude.

## Chapter 270: Assassin Discovered

“Normally I would hold a proper reception for you but unfortunately currently we are in the midst of an emergency,” said the princess.

“Nn. Don’t mind.”

“Thank you so much for understanding.”

The princess bowed apologetically as we watched the adventurers around her scramble to board the horned carriage. It was clear they needed to depart as soon as possible.

Upon getting closer I saw that she looked nothing like the current Beast Lord.

*She’s also kinda weak, so I doubt she’s really his daughter. She’s probably a body double, I think?*

That would explain her bizzare status page. All evolved beastkin should receive a species specific skill upon awakening. For example, a black tigerkin would get Lightning Rush and a black heavenly tigerkin would get Brilliant Lightning Rush. The Beast Lord is a golden flame lionkin and I saw he had Golden Flame of Extinction, so this gold lionkin should have had something similar.

*Hmm... Nothing quite seems to add up. There are too many inconsistencies. She has to be a body double or something.*

I doubted that the guildmaster would fall for such a disguise. He was likely aware of the situation. The extravagant escort he commissioned was probably intended to help sell the story and trick people into thinking that the royal guard really was the princess. With this level of preparation, it was impossible for anyone that didn’t already know her to tell that she was a fake, especially if they saw her treated and addressed as a member of the royal family.

“Master?”

*“Nah, it’s nothing. I’m just thinking about the princess and how she’s probably a fake.”*

*“Fake? What do?”*

*“Good question. Honestly, I dunno.”*

There was zero benefit towards pointing out the princess was a fake. We would probably jeopardize some important mission, piss off the Beastkin’s Country, and have our backs marked as a result.

In the end, we just saw the “princess” off. She gave us a light bow, boarded her personal carriage, and then quickly departed with the rest of her entourage. She had only exchanged a few words with Fran, but we didn’t mind. If anything, it worked in our favour. We wanted to get the capital ASAP and being asked to have tea with the princess or even guard her would have been a bother.

*“Alright. Let’s go to the guild.”*

*“Nn.”*

And so we turned towards town but Fran suddenly stopped as we found ourselves upon the town’s gate.

*“What’s wrong Fran?”*

*“Master, something there.”*

*“Where?”*

She pointed towards one of the gate’s supports. There, I picked up a strange presence, like a monster trying to escape detection. The person in question was quite skilled, but not enough to escape Fran’s senses. The only reason why I didn’t pick up on him myself was because he wasn’t hostile. He was just trying to hide, it seemed.

*Wow, I’m impressed she actually noticed him.*

I decided to scope the mystery man out since he was clearly beyond your average back alley punk.

*“Wait here,” I told Fran.*

*“Nn.”*

I teleported closer to better investigate. I found the person in an alley beside the gate. He was hiding in the shadows and using a skill to further hide his presence. I quickly appraised him.

*Hmm. So he's an assassin.*

The man's name was Genro and his class was assassin. He must have been a veteran given his Noble Killer title. I would have ignored him if he was just another punk or hired sword but someone of his caliber shouldn't be left to his own devices. I decided to capture and forcefully interrogate him. I used telekinesis to freeze him in place, then used earth magic to mold the ground and constrain his lower half.

*Fuck yeah! Surprise attack success!*

"W-What!?" he exclaimed.

*"I've caught you."* I spoke to him telepathically. *"Don't try to resist."*

*"Don't fuck wi—"*

*"You won't find me. Don't bother trying"*

*"Kuh..."*

I was actually just hiding on the other side of the wall behind him. But being a sword, I didn't get caught by skills capable of searching for living creatures. Only people with high leveled magic detection skills could track me down.

*"Now let's get down to business, Genro."*

*"Wha-?!"*

*"Don't try to lie. I already know everything about you."*

*"You have appraisal?!"*

*"Why are you here? To assassinate the princess?"*

*"..."*

*"Silence, huh?"*

*"...Guh."*

Genro bit into his mouth. He had a poisoned capsule embedded into his tooth. As his face turned purple and his pupils began to widen,

*"Nice try asshole. Antidote!"*

I healed him.

"What!?" he shouted.

*"That was a strong poison. But too bad my healing magic is stronger."*

*"-are you kidding me?!"*

*“And don’t bother biting your tongue. I can heal that too.”*

*“ ... ”*

*“Now answer my questions. I’ll have to get rough if you don’t.”*

*“ ... ”*

*“Well, you asked for it.”*

And so I beat him close to death. He didn’t actually tell me anything, but I was able to put together what happened by using Principle of Falsehood whenever he said “no” or “I don’t know.” The results? Genro was an assassin from the Kingdom of Bashar and he was actively targeting Princess Nemea. His plan was to chase down the convoy and kill her. He apparently thinks *that* princess is real. That body double must be doing a good job if they can draw people of his caliber out. Genro moaned in pain. Now what to do with a half-dead assassin?

*I should probably hand him over to the guards if I can find a way to call them over.*

While carefully aiming high into the sky, I fired a flame-based explosion above the town. The sound of the blast reverberated throughout the town.

*Guards will definitely come running after that. Yep, in fact here comes three of them.*

“You there! Freeze!” they shouted.

“Yeah yeah I know.”

I had made a human shaped doppelganger beforehand. I raised its arms as if to surrender and then gestured towards Genro’s body.

“This guy is a Basharian assassin.” I spoke through the doppelganger.

“What? How do you know this?”

“He was after Princess Nemea so I captured him. I’m turning him over to you. Have fun~”

“Wait what do you mea-holy crap he’s vanishing!?”

The guards, stunned, watched my doppelganger melt into thin air. After blinking a few times, they suddenly remembered they had an alleged assassin to deal with. They looked down and saw his hands and feet were already bound, courtesy of me, of course. After watching them take the assassin in, I pat myself on the back for a job well done.



*Welp. Back to Fran I go.*

## Chapter 271: Roserraccoon's Guildmaster

After handing off the assassin to the guards, I returned to Fran. Together, we made our way to the Adventurers' Guild. We entered and found the inside to be unusually quiet.

*Well a whole load of adventurers just left with the princess so I guess it makes sense for it to be empty.*

"Ey! 'Elcome!"

A loud voice called out to us from the counter. The receptionist was a hearty, middle aged man with a rolled up headband around his forehead, one that would not look out of place at a fisherman's market by the wharf. We approached the counter.

"Interestin'. You the Black Lightning Princess, lassie?" he asked.

"Nn. Me."

"I knew it! Good to have you 'ere!"

He nodded as he examined Fran's guild card.

*Goddamn, this dude is way too lively!*

"So what can I help ya with today?" he asked.

"Want to know how to get to capital," said Fran.

"The capital? Oh, ya wanna go to Vestia? Normally, ya wanna find yourself a horned carriage."

"Normally?"

"Yeah." He scratched his head. "They've all been rented out for the time being."

"Princess?"

"Yeah. I told the guildmaster he was spendin' way too much on the adventurers and the horned carriages, but he didn't listen to me. Our guildmaster's the type that really likes to please his higher ups, ya see."

The guildmaster employed all the adventurers and horned carriages available just to ingratiate himself to the royals.

"But honestly, I can't really say anythin' too negative 'bout it. I can get why

he's goin' all out for our royals, y'see."

"Why?" asked Fran.

"O'course. The country's been doin' real well since the current Beast Lord took over. He 'imself used to be an adventurer, so he's been givin' the guild a good cut of benefits too."

At first, I'd thought that the guildmaster was just a tool, but it turned out there was a bit more to it. He and many other adventurers simply adored the Beast Lord and the adventurer-benefiting policies he stood behind.

*But will Roserraccoon be okay with so many adventurers and horned carriages missing? What if there is an emergency?*

"Guild empty, okay?" asked Fran.

"Haha don't ya worry! We can deal with it lassie" he replied. "This city's a hotspot as far as adventurers go. They gather here from all over the country, 'specially if they're planning on makin' use of The Shortcut. Give it 10 days or so, and we'll be just as full as we were this mornin'."

"Got it," Fran nodded.

"We'll ask for reinforcements from the guild in the capital," he said. "Couple o' strong guys would come and keep us covered for a bit. Our guildmaster's pretty capable too."

"Guildmaster, strong?" asked Fran.

"Yeah. He's gotta be to be a guildmaster," he said. "Plus we're in this situation cuz of his selfishness, so we're gonna work 'im to the bone haha!"

*Seems like my worries about the lack of manpower were needless.*

"So," he said. "A normal horse carriage takes 'round five to six days to reach Vestia, ya see."

"Route complicated?" asked Fran.

"Route? Naw it's basically a straight line from 'ere to Vestia. There's even a highway built for carriages, so ya can't get lost."

"Okay. Thanks."

"You plannin' to head over by yerself?"

"Nn."

"Well, if even half the rumors 'bout ya are true, then you'd be there sooner without a carriage."

I don't know what these rumors are but if they are basically equating us with an A rank adventurer then they're probably accurate enough.

"They be some crazy rumours. They sa—" the receptionist was about to continue talking, but suddenly stopped himself short.

"Something wrong?" asked Fran.

"Seems like the guildmaster's callin' for ya," he said.

"Nn?"

"Our guildmaster here's a wind mage. 'e can send his voice to specific people."

*Huh, interesting.*

It definitely sounds plausible if you can control vibrations in the air. Although you'd probably need a good amount of skill in order to make the message clearly reach the person you're targeting. It seems the guildmaster uses this technique to give orders to people around the guild.

"Just go upstairs?" asked Fran.

"Yeah. Sorry in advance," he said. "If our guildmaster says somethin' stupid just smack 'im."

"Got it."

"But he's not a bad person at heart so don't worry."

Those words alone gave me a rough understanding of his character. We went upstairs and entered the indicated door only to find a frivolous looking man standing beyond the doorway.

"Hello there!" he said with a cheap smile. "I am Emyute, the guildmaster of Rosserracoon's adventurer guild and a Wind Soul Tanukikin."

"Rank C adventurer, Fran. Black Heavenly Tigerkin."

"So you're the legendary beastkin? This is an amazing moment for me. You definitely look as strong as you look cute, so I can see why the Beast Lord approves of you."

He seems to be an evolved tanukikin, and from the species name, he is a subspecies that specializes in wind magic. Overall the receptionist was right about him. He seemed lighthearted and kind of annoying but not a bad person at heart.

"Had business with me?" asked Fran.

“Straight to the point I see,” he said. “To be honest I wanted a favor from you.”

“Favor?”

“Yes. You see we just captured an foreign assassin. The problem is, his target was the princess.”

“Princess Nemea?”

“Exactly.”

Does he mean the assassin I just caught? Holy shit, information in this town travels really freaking fast. I really didn't think information would have gotten all the way from the guards to the guildmaster even if there were no delays up the chain of command.

“You see, we have a magical item for communications in the guard room,” he said. “Everything they report goes to me. I just got this information a few minutes ago so your timing was absolutely perfect.”

“So, need what?” asked Fran.

“It's simple. Deliver this letter to the capital. You can treat it as a proper quest.”

“Okay to deliver to guild in capital?”

“You can move much faster than a horse-drawn carriage, right?”

*We're being directly asked by the guildmaster himself so why not? We're going to the capital anyway and doing this will put the guildmaster in our debt.*

“We should accept,” I said.

“Got it,” said Fran. “Will accept quest.”

“Thank you so much!” said the guildmaster. “You're doing me such a huge favor. Inside this letter is a request for more escorts for the princess so the faster the better okay?”

“But guarded by lots of adventurers already?” asked Fran.

“Hmm...well I guess it's okay to tell you since I want this letter delivered for sure. But no telling other people, okay? An oath of silence will be included in this quest.”

“No problem” said Fran. “Will swear on tail.”

“The truth is that the princess that just left town is a fake. The real princess is elsewhere.”

*Booyah! I fucking called it!*

Sending thirty adventurers and all those horned carriages with the fake princess seemed kind of questionable. It turned out it really was all a ploy to make the fake princess seem more real. The assassin I captured had some doubts. There was a chance that other assassins may have started catching on as well.

“Delivering the letter is also for the safety of the real princess,” said the guildmaster.

“Got it.”

“That aside, would you care to join me for a meal before departing?”

“Not hurried?”

“That is that and this is this. It would not do for you to travel on an empty stomach. Above all else I get to have a meal with a lovely lady!”

But Fran is still a child, you pedophile!

“Hmph.” Fran landed a beautiful jab right into his abdomen.

The guildmaster groaned. “But why...?” he asked.

“Receptionist said: ‘If our guildmaster says somethin’ stupid just smack ‘im’.”

“Damn him...ugh that hurt.”

“Hurry up. Tell way to get to capital.”

“Fine...”

And so we got the letter and managed to extract detailed directions to the capital from the guildmaster. It was pretty much just a straight line down the highway with only one branch somewhere in the middle. We had to turn right there then just follow the road. Information in hand, we exited the guild and made our way out of town to a place suitable for departure.

*“Alright let’s do this!”*

“Urushi, do best.”

“Woof!”

Fran mounted Urushi.

*“Fly, Urushi! Fly!”* I commanded.

“Woof woof!”

Urushi accelerated into a full run. His top speed was so fast we might even reach the capital in a single day.

*“Aww hell yeah! YAHOOOOOOOOOO~!”*

*“Yahoo!”*

*“Woof woof!”*

*Urushi’s clearly having fun since it’s his first time running without hindrances in quite some time. Wait. Holy shit, he’s still accelerating. We might arrive even earlier than I anticipated.*

## Chapter 272: Guendalfa

Urushi, full of spirit, raced non-stop down the highway connecting Roserraccoon and Vestia. After a mere eight hours of travel, we spotted the capital city looming in the horizon. This was the first time I had travelled to any capital city since reincarnating as a sword, so I was absolutely stunned by the sight. Barbara was the largest city I'd been to so far and it *paled* in comparison to Vestia. It was night time, so the whole city was illuminated by torchlight and magical fire. The flickering lights dancing on the massive 20 meter high ramparts were magnificent to behold. The royal castle could be seen standing tall over the walls and towering over the city. Its spire was easily the tallest building I had seen yet, easily visible even from a distance.

*"You think they'll let us in at this time of night?"*

"Nnn... Don't mind camping out."

*"Yeah but I'd rather we don't. Let's just keep that in mind as a backup plan."*

Some cities closed their gates after dark as a preventive measure against thieves and monsters. I wasn't sure if the capital was one of them. As we approached, we thankfully found that the gates were still open. Merchants and adventurers were lined up outside the gate in an orderly fashion. There appeared to be some formal procedures that must be taken care of before being allowed to enter. As expected of a capital city, the security was much tighter.

We joined a line that was around twenty people long with Urushi once again in his smaller form. People were already nervous because it was night time and we didn't want to exacerbate that by having a giant wolf suddenly appear in front of them.

*I wanted to casually join the line without drawing any attention but apparently Fran stands out a bit too much for that. We're getting a lot of stares.*

It seemed people were surprised to see a girl her age travelling with only a wolf by her side. Even more so that she was a black catkin, which was supposed to be the weakest of the beastkin tribes. Those that curiously observed her



would realize that she had evolved, which caused them to be taken aback.

“Huh, wha?”

“Are my eyes actually working?”

“No way! It’s her, the...”

“Dude, it’s the Black Lightning Princess.”

“Black Lightning Princess? Who’s that?”

The merchants and adventurers around us whispered in hushed voices. But since we’re already used to it, Fran, Urushi, and I paid no heed to it. After waiting in line for a few minutes, we were approached by three catkin.

“Umm... sorry to bother you. Are you perhaps the Black Lightning Princess?”

“Nn?”

“We call ourselves The Six Whiskers. We’re a party of catkin. We’re huge fans of you and your accomplishments. ”

The speaker was a young red catkin. Standing behind him were his companions, another red catkin who looked to be in his twenties and an older blue catkin likely in his thirties or forties.

“Dang... She really did evolve.”

“Looks like those rumors were true.”

The two whispered to one another. I was on guard against the blue catkin. I expected him to try badmouthing Fran, but he did nothing of the sort. If anything, his face showed only a look of admiration.

*Huh, I’m surprised to see a blue catkin that isn’t a scumbag. Though, I probably shouldn’t be, given the Beast Lord’s black catkin-related reforms. [1]*

In the end, the Six Whiskers didn’t have any particular business with Fran besides wanting to greet her. They were mostly interested in her because she evolved. At first, I got a little nervous over questions that might expose the exploit we used to evolve her, but thankfully that didn’t come up. Our discussions did however inform them about the conditions needed for black catkin to evolve. We explained to them that black catkin needed to either slay a thousand Evil Beings or defeat an A ranked one in single combat to evolve. It was good way to kill some time while waiting in line.

As more people started to approach us, a huge figure suddenly cut in through the crowd. The man stood two meters tall and was emanating a clear aura of hostility.

“Hey you,” he said. “Are you the brat they call the ‘Black Lightning Princess’?”  
“Nn? Mhm.”

“Gwahaha! My shitty uncle must be losing it if he even lost to a brat like you!”

I was filled with an unpleasant feeling when he burst into laughter. I appraised him and saw that he was a white rhinokin, not yet evolved. His name was Guendalfa. Given his race and the similarity of the names, I could only think of one acquaintance that he could possibly be related to: Goldalfa, the white rhinokin and Beast Lord’s guard that fought Fran in the tournament at Ulmutt and lost.

*“Hey Fran. I think this guy’s related to Goldalfa.”*

“Goldalfa’s acquaintance?” she said.

“Hah!” he snorted. “A little brat is addressing you without a title. Look how far you’ve fallen.” He pointed to his chest. “I am Guendalfa. The one you speak of, Goldalfa, is a coward. As much as I hate to admit it, he’s my father’s older brother.”

“Coward?”

Fran’s face twitched in annoyance. Goldalfa was a warrior Fran came to respect through fierce battle. She did not like some condescending little shit disrespecting him.

“He’s a fucking coward,” said Guendalfa. “He threw away his position of patriarch of our clan just to become the Beast Lord’s little bitch.”

“Not coward. Strong, brave warrior!”

“Strong? After losing to someone as fucking puny as you? What a joke. How about I kick your little ass and prove how much of a pussy he really is?”

*“You’re free to take him down but be mindful of our surroundings.”* I tried to calm Fran down. *“We don’t want to be refused entry because we caused a scene.”*

“Nn. Change locations.” said Fran.

“Haaaaaaah?” he sneered. “Why? You scared? Come at me, brat!”

“Don’t wanna cause a scene.”

“Stuff your bitch-ass mouth and just fucking do it!”

Fran did not respond.

*“Hey Fran. Calm down a bit. Rather, you’re totally ready to go at it aren’t you!?”*

*“No problem. Instant victory.”*

*Welp we’ve passed the point of no return.*

The crowd began to shout.

“Don’t worry Black Lightning Princess!”

“We’ll testify that he started it!”

“Go kick his ass!”

*Oi! Peanut Gallery! Don’t encourage her dammit!*

I quickly used Stonewall to enclose Guendalfa and Fran to block them from the surroundings.

“Take this. Awakening. Brilliant Lightning Rush. Serious Punch.”

“Guboh-!” Fran’s lightning straight landed square on Guendalfa’s chest.

“-GWUAAAHHHHHHHHHHH!”

**ONE PUNCH FRAN!**

Guendalfa was sent flying, crashing straight through the stonewall I erected. His armor was completely caved in and blood was flying from his mouth.

Fran shook her wrist.

“Hmph. So weak for talking so big?”

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[1] For those that don’t remember. The beast lord’s reforms fought back against black catkin slavery and effectively ran a lot of blue catkin out of their original line of work. Master is stating that fewer of them are criminals because they had to pick up more respectable jobs.

## Chapter 273: Reasons

"You, weak," said Fran.

Guendalfa did not reply

*"So I don't think he can respond very well while unconscious..."*

"That punch? Goldalfa would barely feel."

*"Well, yeah. Goldalfa was almost immortal. Not a fair comparison."*

*So what the hell are we supposed to do with a knocked out rhinokin anyway...?*

Fran wasn't satisfied and was glaring terribly at Guendalfa.

"Get up."

She kicked him, but the only response she got was an unconscious groan. The rhinokin showed no sign of waking, so she kicked him again and again. A guard came out of the station and approached us.

"Okay okay, that's enough, everyone break it up," he said.

"Hmph," said Fran, giving one last kick.

"Oh man though. Hell of a way to knock him out in one hit!"

Oh shit! We may have gone way too far. I hope they'll still let us in.

The guard poured a generous amount of recovery potion on Guendalfa's body and spoke to Fran.

"Sooo, can you let him go now? I know he was being an ass, but I don't think he deserves to be killed."

*Huh? So we're not in trouble at all? Wait. If he knew he was being a little shit, this means that he saw the confrontation leading up to the fight. Why didn't he stop us?*

"Didn't stop, why?" asked Fran.

"To be honest, he had it coming and I wanted to see someone beat the crap out of him," said the guard. "I already knew how strong you were, so I thought you would be the perfect person for the job."

“Nn. Easy,” Fran boasted.

Oh god dammit Fran. Don’t go tooting your god damn horn just ‘cause he praised your ability to beat up some random grunt.

“I used to know Goldalfa back in the day,” said the guard. “He really saved my ass when I was starting up myself. I really looked up to him. Guen too. He was really attached to his uncle back in they day. He would go on and on about how he was going to do everything to help ol’ Gold out once he became the family Patriarch.”

*Goldalfa as some sort of patriarch? Yeah, I could see that. The guy’s mad strong, so I could totally see him pulling it off.*

“Goldalfa became the Beast Lord’s guard and renounced his position before it was even passed to him,” continued the guard, “Guen saw that as betraying expectations. The position went to Guen’s father instead. And as of recent, Guen’s started channeling his emotions into surpassing his uncle.”

*So that’s why he challenged Fran. If he could beat Fran, who beat Goldalfa, then the implication is that he would be stronger than Goldalfa. He’s oversimplifying it and kind of wrong, but I can at least see where he’s coming from.*

“Sorry about him,” said the guard. “I’ll make sure to tell him off. I’m not sure if this is enough to make up for this, but if you need any help just call me. I’ll do whatever I can. You have my word.”

The guard bowed, then effortlessly picked up Guendalfa with one hand and slung him over his shoulder. I was shocked because the guard was a scrawny man and Guendalfa was no lightweight. After a quick appraisal I saw that the guard was a high leveled oxkin on the verge of evolving.

*Not bad for a city guard.*

He was apparently going to throw Guendalfa into the slammer for a bit so he could cool his head.

*“At this point I think we should just forgive him. It’s not like dealing with him really cost us anything, after all.”*

“Nn. Good exercise.”

After that we managed to enter the capital without further incident. We got the location of the Adventurers' Guild from a guard when passing through the gate, so we didn't have to stop and look for it en route. Passing through the city had once again demonstrated to us the sheer amount of respect with which beastkin treated those that had evolved. Not a single beastkin adventurer messed with us on our way to the guild, and all the non-beastkin that seemed to want to were quickly shut down by their buddies. Guendalfa had been the only odd one out.

Vestia was an enormous city, so we expected the guild to be scaled up proportionally. But upon reaching it, we found that it was disappointingly only about the same size as the guilds in Roserracoon and Argentlapn. Fran entered the guild.

"Good evening," she said.

"Welcome," replied the receptionist. "How can I hel-ahh. Would you happen to be Fran?"

"Nn. Know me?"

"Yes! All of us guild staff in the beastkin country know you. The staff from the Argentlapn branch sent out a message from a magic communicator informing the other branches of your arrival."

*Wait, there's such an item for long distance communication? That's probably how the guildmaster in Roserracoon quickly received the info on the assassin I nabbed. Thinking about it, it only makes sense for every branch to have such a device. But then, why would they need to have us deliver a letter if they have something that convenient? I thought they gave us this letter because they had no other way to send messages over long distances. Then again, Dias did mention that he talked to other guildmasters around the time of the tournament. At this point I don't know what to make of the situation so let's just hand over the letter.*

"This. From Roserracoon's guildmaster," said Fran.

"A letter?" The receptionist received the envelope. "Let's see. Hmm... I see. There's no mistake. Please wait a moment."

After examining the seal on the letter, the receptionist got up and hurried to an office in the back. After a couple minutes of waiting, she came back, brought

us around the counter, and took us to the back.

“Guildmaster, I have brought her,” said the receptionist.

“Good work. Please return to your post,” said the voice of an old man.

“Understood.”

We entered the office and saw an old man with a crooked back, a set of white fox ears, and a white tail.

*Normally, I'd get all excited upon encountering someone with real fox ears and a fluffy tail, but an old man...? Yeah, no.*

“I am Melrosse,” he said. “Master of the Vestia’s Adventurers’ Guild.”

“C ranked adventurer, Fran.”

“Hohoho I see. You are even more powerful than the rumors suggest. Indeed very reliable.”

My first impression was that he was just a kind old man. But his eyes carried a very sharp glint as they evaluated Fran.

*There's more to him than he gives off. We can't underestimate him.*

## Chapter 274: Of Letters and Items

Melrosse opened the letter and read it carefully.

“I see... Well done, Black Lightning Princess! We will hereby move to immediately support the princess.”

*So the letter really was about guarding the princess. But again, why use a letter when they have magical long distance communicators?*

“Why letter?” asked Fran telepathically.

“Good question,” I replied.

“Nn. Faster to use item.”

It seemed Fran and I were wondering the same thing.

“You were of great help,” said Melrosse.

“Nn...”

“Ho? What is it young one? Your face clearly shows unvoiced dissatisfaction.”

*What!? How did he know that?*

It really bothered me that he had accurately interpreted Fran’s expression. Fran was never the type of person to wear her emotions and that was true even now. The change in her expression was so subtle that I’d assumed I was the only one capable of noticing it. I unconsciously appraised him before I could stop myself. Since I’d already gone ahead and done it, I decided I might as well check his skills and confirmed that he didn’t have anything that would allow him to read her mind.

“Could tell, how?” asked Fran.

“Ho. When you have lived as long as I have you can observe what other people often miss.”

*Seriously? Just pure wisdom from age? What the hell!.*

“...Can use item. Why send letter?” asked Fran.

“Hoho, so it was the letter that was bothering you. There is a significant reason why we chose to use that method in particular. Would you like me to explain it?”



“Nn.”

“Very well.”

The guildmaster held the letter out to Fran.

“Okay to read?” she asked.

“Indeed.”

Fran and I took a look at the contents. The letter described how a Basharian assassin was caught in the beastkin country and that the evident danger was reason to provide the princess with additional guards. It didn't seem like anything out of the ordinary save the code-like numbers that followed the rest of the letter's content. I glanced at Melrose and found him carefully observing Fran.

“Weird numbers? Meaning?” asked Fran.

“They contain information pertaining to the princess' destination,” he said. “We encrypt the information for security reasons.”

The guildmaster went on to explain why they used a letter and not the long distance communication tool. It turned out the Basharians also had similar tools, and the concern was that they could eavesdrop on conversations in the beastkin country. Information on assassinations and invasion plans had apparently been compromised in the past. If that was the case, I could see why they would rely on a physical letter for top secret information.

“If we knew the exact methods they used to eavesdrop on us we could deploy countermeasures,” he frowned.

“Not known?” asked Fran.

“Yes, their methods are unknown to us. That is the only reason we fall back on more traditional methods of communication, like letters. Strong couriers like you are essential to the swift relay of information.”

I was using Principle of Falsehood during the entire conversation. All the parts that the guildmaster said about Bashar was true. But the very last part about it being the *only* reason was a lie. It could be that simply an organization as large as the guild would naturally have one or two secrets. But I couldn't help but feel bothered that we were used for more than just confidential communication..

I hope we weren't used for something malicious.

I discussed my suspicions with Fran.

*"Nn. Will ask discreetly," she said.*

*"Yeah, let's try not to make an enemy of the guild. If he doesn't talk then just drop the matter."*

*"Nn."*

Fran turned to the guildmaster.

"What are other reasons?"

*Oi! What's with that straight-ball question!? There's nothing discreet about that!*

"Hmm?" said Melrosse.

"If need speed, then send letter by bird," said Fran. "Still hiding something. Wanted me to deliver. Why?"

"Hm. You are certainly right that a messenger bird would be quicker, or some other method of communication too. But we still have our reasons."

"Which are?"

"Not telling. This information is not privy to a C ranker."

Welp we just got stonewalled by the bureaucracy. Can't do anything about that.

"Don't glare at me like that," he said. "I'll still tell you what I can. You see, that letter was intended to verify whether or not our country's guilds could trust you."

"Some sort of test?" asked Fran.

"No comment. But just like how you are doubting me right now, we were also doubting you since you came to our country. You have yet to do anything to earn our trust."

And so they asked us to deliver a top secret letter? I don't know how it proves our trustworthiness, but I'm glad we actually did our job properly and refrained from breaking the seal on the envelope. We were accustomed to being welcomed with open arms in the beastkin country simply because Fran evolved. Most of the people we met had assumed that Fran was someone that would help them in their time of need. But in reality, not all beastkin would necessarily ally themselves with the beastkin country. As far as the guild was concerned, we'd started off on the list of those that couldn't be trusted, but with this task

under our belts we were under far less scrutiny.

“Got it,” said Fran.

“Hoh. So are you satisfied with this explanation?” he asked.

“For now.”

“Very good. We are grateful for the work you have done for us, so we shall give you a suitable reward.”

“Nn. Got it.”

We exited the guildmaster’s room and headed to the counter where we received our reward. By the time we headed to an inn recommended by the Adventurers’ Guild it was well into the night. Thankfully the inn had a receptionist posted 24 hours a day. It was quite suitable for adventurers who did not have consistent schedules and would often request lodging and random times at night..

When we got to our room Fran jumped headfirst into the bed.

*“At least take off your cloak.”*

“Uuu...”

*“I’ll cast purification on you and clean you up.”*

“Nmmm”

*“Come on. Get into the covers too, okay?”*

“Mmph.”

I tucked Fran, who was half asleep, into bed using telekinesis.

*“Goodnight.”*

“Nn.”

Fran was out within three seconds.

*Children do need their sleep after all.*

*Tomorrow’s the day we finally visit the castle. I was a bit concerned about getting around at first, but luckily the guildmaster said that he would provide us with a guide. Hopefully we’ll finally get to meet Kiara, the older catkin who was instrumental towards Fran’s growth. I wonder what kind of person she is. Hopefully someone that will spoil Fran like a child.*

## Chapter 275: An Unexpected Reunion

Fran and I were both eager to get on with the day, so we headed over to the Adventurers' Guild as soon as we finished our morning routines.

"Good Morning Fran," greeted the receptionist.

"Morning."

"Are you planning to head to the castle right now?"

"Nn."

"Understood. Please wait a moment while I go retrieve your guide."

"Nn."

We found a seat in the guild's lobby while we waited. There wasn't much to do besides observing the guild staff members as they went about their day-to-day activities, so we resigned ourselves to watching them.

"Hey babe! Won't you do dinner with me tonight?"

"Hmph. Like you don't say that to every girl you meet."

"Hey! Isn't this way to cheap for these materials?"

"Nah, they're in terrible shape so they aren't worth crap."

Most of the receptionists were conducting themselves rather unprofessionally. Their default approach was to deal with the adventurers as casually as they would their buddies. Fran was the only one they treated with courtesy and respect.

We were currently the center of attention and received many a curious glance from the adventurers around us. In spite of that, we remained undisturbed. Anyone that tried to approach us would immediately be stopped by one of the guild's staff members. We eavesdropped on their conversations and overheard them claim that there were orders to ensure Fran was left alone.

We couldn't help but wonder why the guild was preventing people from approaching us, but we didn't want to bother the guild's staff while they were busy, so the question remained unanswered until one of the staff members approached Fran and served her a cup of tea.

"The guildmaster's ordered us not to let anybody bother you," she said. "You

are the only evolved black catkin, and adventurers are a curious bunch, so he was concerned that you would be subject to the discomfort of becoming a circus attraction.”

Preventing curious onlookers from bothering has eliminated the chance that an unfortunate confrontation would ignite between Fran and some newbie ignorant of her strength. It was a preventative measure that not only allowed the guild to protect its adventurers from getting hurt, but also benefit us by keeping the morons off our backs. It was a win-win situation.

*The guildmaster is doing us a favor here, so we better thank him later. Though, it seems being left alone is making Fran awfully bored.*

The receptionist we first interacted with returned by the time Fran had finished her cup of tea, our supposed guide in tow.

“Guendalfa?” said Fran.

Fran was frightfully bad at remembering people’s names but even she wouldn’t forget the name of someone she met the day before.

“Yeah, I heard about that little scuffle you had with him yesterday,” said the receptionist. “If you would like, I could make arrangements for a replacement guide. What do you say?”

*If they heard about yesterday’s fight, why bother bringing him out in the first place?*

My thoughts were interrupted as Guendalfa suddenly prostrated himself in front of Fran. Seeing him with his hands, face, and knees all pressed against the floor really emphasized the sheer size of his frame. He was so massive that he was *still* taller than Fran even in his current state.

“My deepest apologies, Black Lightning Princess!” he shouted, digging his forehead into the ground. “My unseemly actions yesterday were truly regrettable.”

His attitude had taken a full 180.

“I am uncertain if this will suffice as compensation but I offer my services to you during the entirety of your stay in the capital,” he said.

I was deeply suspicious of him just trying to get closer to Fran again for some banal revenge plot but his eyes were full of sincerity. A single glance was enough to convince me that his actions had been driven by earnesty and earnesty alone.

“Ate something bad?” asked Fran, creeped out.

“After being blown away by you and then lectured by my buddy, Brass, I have realized how deeply shallow I have been behaving,” he said.

“Brass?”

“Brass was the gate guard that carried me off yesterday.”

“The oxkin?”

“Yes.” Guendalfa raised his head. “Black Lightning Princess! I plan to use this opportunity to turn my life around. But first I must show gratitude to the one who opened my eyes. Please let me be of service to you.”

“*What should we do, Fran?*” I asked her telepathically. His change was so sudden that it left me at a loss.

“*Nn. Don’t care.*”

It seems she no longer bore any animosity towards Guendalfa. A good night’s sleep had been more than enough for her to forgive him. While we had our internal dialogue, the receptionist whispered in Fran’s ear.

“The rhinokin are a tribe of warriors,” she said. “It’s natural for them to show respect to those who defeat them in combat. On top of that, you are an evolved beastkin while he is not. His respectful attitude is completely natural.”

*So basically he’s a musclehead that believes power and strength are everything?*

“Also, he’s the son of the rhinokin patriarch,” continued the receptionist. “His face is well known, he has standing, and some authority. He is probably the best guide you could get.”

In the end, we decided to accept Guendalfa as our guide. He seemed to have seriously reflected on his actions. Sending him away and finding a new guide seemed like more like a waste of time than anything.

“Look forward to working with you,” said Fran.

“No, it is my honor to be of use to you,” he replied.

“Nn.”

“I know you want to go to the castle, but could I perhaps interest you in a tour of the capital? I was born and raised in Vestia and I could take you to the best spots around town.”

“No thanks. Person want to meet as soon as possible.”

“I see. Is that person in the royal castle?”

“Nn. Black catkin: Kiara.”

“Master Kiara? Understood.”

“Acquainted?”

“Yes. I have been her disciple since I was a child.”

Given his former attachment to Goldalfa, one of Kiara’s disciples, his relationship with the old black catkin came as no surprise.

“Understood. I will introduce you to her,” he said.

“Please do.”

“Leave it to me.”

Guendalfa stuck his chest out proudly as he nodded. He seemed really confident. I was almost inclined to think that we could actually trust him to get the job done.

## Chapter 276: Vestia's Royal Castle

Guendalfa led us out of the Adventurers' Guild and onto the street after boasting that he would introduce us to Kiara. His massive frame parted the bustling crowd like water, making it really easy for us to follow behind him. We could see the Royal Castle from the Adventurers' Guild but that didn't mean it was close by. That was just how big it was; its sheer size messed with my sense of distance. It took us twenty minutes to walk from the Adventurers' Guild to the gate of the Royal Castle. As we approached, we saw that the walls around the castle were just as tall and wide as the walls surrounding Vestia. There was even a moat carved around the castle like a muddy serpent gouged into the earth, complete with a wooden drawbridge featuring a stone gatehouse on top.

"This castle was designed as the capital city's final bastion," explained Guendalfa. He seemed to have decided to play the role of tour guide for us. "If need be, the castle can be turned into a fully armed and fortified stronghold. Any enemies that manage to breach the city's walls will have to deal with a second set."

As we approached, a guard appeared out of a house next to the drawbridge on the town side.

"Halt," he said. "You are now entering upon the royal castle. All who wish to pass must first validate their identities."

Guendalfa approached the guard.

"I am Guendalfa, son of the Patriarch of the Rhinokin. With me is the Black Lightning Princess herself! I vouch for her identity on my honour. I also carry a letter of recommendation from the guildmaster in Vestia."

He handed over a black card and a sealed letter to the guard. After opening up the letter and reading the contents carefully, the guard looked at us in disbelief.

"You could get an audience with the king with this letter," he muttered.

*An audience with the king? What the hell kind of recommendation did that guildmaster write us? He puts way too much faith into us for just completing*



*one delivery quest.*

It would make sense if the guildmaster had planned to give Fran such a recommendation all along with the quest as a pretext to give it to her. The guild probably wanted to build ties with the first black catkin to evolve since the tribe's downfall. Fran may as well have been a living legend, and because of that, the guild wanted to gain her favor early into her career. Likewise, the Beast Lord had given her a crest with his personal ensignia engraved into it back in Ulmutt right after the tournament. He was probably thinking the same thing.

*Actually given his musclehead personality, probably not. But Royce, his aide, had definitely thought that quickly establishing a working relationship with Fran was prudent given her circumstances.*

I urged Fran to give the guard the crest. It was most likely a more trustworthy form of ID, and I figured there was no harm in showing it.

"Nn."

"This is...!" The guard's eyes bulged from their sockets. Guendalfa also stared daggers into the crest.

"P-P-Please wait one moment, ma'am!" stuttered the guard and he dashed back into the guardhouse. We saw him hold the crest up to a crystal shard, which flashed briefly upon activation. Afterwards, the guard ran back to us and gingerly handed the crest back to Fran.

"H-here's your ID back, ma'am," he said. "Everything is in order. Please enter!"

He signaled behind him and the gates of the portcullis across the drawbridge slowly began to open.

"Amazing! You even had the Beast Lord's crest with you," said Guendalfa.

"You didn't need me at all. You should have left someone like me behind."

"Not true."

Fran was right. Even if we wouldn't have needed Guendalfa to pass through the gates, he really helped smoothen the process out by escorting us and interacting with the guard on our behalf. More importantly, his company had made us seem like the real deal. I was sure the guards would have doubted us more and spent more time investigating our motives had he not been present. I had to say, his change in attitude had really benefited us. Guendalfa's behaviour

had come as a bit of a surprise, but it was by no means unprecedented. Goldalfa had also become more deferential to Fran after losing to her in single combat.

After passing through the gates on the castle side, Fran and I noticed another set of walls set up down the road.

“Another wall?”

“Yes,” said Guendalfa. “The castle is right past it.”

“Why two walls?”

“The wall ahead of us separates the nobles and the common folk. The outskirts are designated as the living quarters for the guards and servants. It also works as a place for merchants to do business. Behind the wall is where you’ll find all the nobles.”

“How to enter?”

“Allow me to show you. Please follow me.”

We walked alongside the wall and found a massive gate as big as the entrance to the city. There was what appeared to be a large mansion built next to the gate. Guendalfa led us inside. The building’s lobby was enormous. It contained enough space to comfortably house several dozen people on top of the numerous guards and other staff members already stationed throughout. The rhinokin led us up to the counter and spoke to a receptionist.

“I am Guendalfa, and with me is the Black Lightning Princess. We are here to request an audience with my master, Kiara.”

“Very well, we will process your request,” said the receptionist. “Please allow us to guide you to a private waiting room in the meantime.”

Fran’s gaze curiously flickered back and forth as a guard guided us through the mansion. We went up stairways and down hallways, passing by many decorated waiting rooms before finally arriving at our destination.

“You see,” said Guendalfa, resuming his role as tour guide, “the royal family had this mansion built as an extravagant waiting room next to the gate. They wanted as many lounges and private rooms as possible. With security being as high as it is, it takes time to process even just one person’s entry request. And really, you can’t have nobles lining up outside like at some festival stall, can you?”

The guard stopped in front of an intricately patterned door and opened it. Inside was the most lavishly decorated room we've seen yet, complete with a sofa and two armchairs around a coffee table. It also contained a fireplace, an ornate desk with a matching chair, a bookshelf, and a window that let the gentle sunlight seep through. Fran and Guendalfa sat down on the sofa, with Guendalfa sinking a little deeper into the cushions than Fran. After a couple minutes, there was a knock on the door. A maid entered with a cart featuring some freshly brewed tea and a variety of pastries. The moment the maid set the food onto the coffee table, Fran lunged at it. Guendalfa did the same after waiting for her to grab the first bite. Together, the two hungry companions devoured the snacks they were presented in less than a minute.

After letting out a contented sigh, Guendalfa once again began to speak.

"You really are something, Black Lightning Princess."

"Nn?" said Fran, sipping on a cup of tea.

"You see, this room was made to entertain people of noble birth. Normally, common folk wouldn't feel right being in such a fancy place, but you look right at home," he said. "The food too. What they just brought us was some high class stuff but you scarfed it right down like it was 'nuthin."

"You too."

"Well of course. I am a noble, so this much is normal for me."

Fran and I stared.

*What the hell! He was a blue blood?! How the hell does he still have peerage given the attitude he was going around with?*

"What? Why are you so surprised?" laughed Guendalfa. "I know I don't seem like a noble, but my father *is* technically the patriarch of an entire tribe of beastkin, so I'm used to all the bells and frills that comes with having status."

After that surprising revelation, a knock came from the door.

"Excuse me. Madam Fran, Mr. Guendalfa, Lady Kiara will see you now."

The door opened and two maids were waiting for us. We followed them deep into the castle, passing by large banquet halls and wide ballrooms along the way.

“You used to be able to find her on the practice grounds in the outskirts of the castle,” said Guendalfa. “But lately her health has been getting worse, so she’s been confined to her room.”

“Bad health? Will be okay?” asked Fran.

“I’m worried too,” he replied. “She is getting pretty old. But the fact that they let us see her means she’s alright.”

*It can’t be helped. She’s already like 70 years old.*

*“It’s finally time to meet Kiara,”* I said to Fran.

*“Nn.”*

## Chapter 277: Kiara

After taking us deep into the heart of the castle, the maid responsible for guiding us stopped in front of a door with a red carpet and turned around to face us.

“We have arrived at Lady Kiara’s private bedchambers,” she said. “Please wait a moment as I seek permission to enter.”

Fran and Guendalfa nodded as the maid turned around and knocked gently on the door.

“Lady Kiara? Guendalfa and the Black Lightning Princess are here to see you.”  
“Yeah, come in,” said a voice from inside the room.

The maid opened the door for us. There was a desk with a chair next to the window, a full length mirror next to a vanity closet, an armchair in the corner, and a king sized bed in the middle. All the furniture and interior was done with gold or gold leaf, but the designs weren’t gaudy. Rather, they were carefully crafted such that they appeared subdued and pleasing to the eye. The curtains, carpet, and bedsheets were all made of luxurious cloth or silk. The entire room was cleaned and tidy. It was obvious that its inhabitant was being treated as a guest of honor.

An old, black catkin sat upright on the bed. We knew that she was supposed to be a black catkin, but she didn’t quite look the part. The hair on her ears and tail had long turned completely white. Her posture was good, which indicated that she was probably still active in spite of how haggard and thin her body appeared. She was tall too. It looked like she could probably reach 170 cm when standing. She definitely did not give the impression of a frail old lady whose body was wasting away.

She looked at Fran with a gaze of such intensity that I was intimidated for a brief moment. I felt like my heart stopped and that I was pierced with daggers. If I were still human, I probably would have instinctively prostrated myself on the ground out of fear. Fran, however, was completely unperturbed.

“You’re Kiara?”

“And who exactly told you that you could speak to me so bluntly?”

“Beast Lord.”

“Hah!” She slapped her knee. “Good to know. I’ll be sure to smack him hard next time I see him.”

*Whoa she definitely speaks pretty brusquely. But, surprisingly, it fits her quite well.*

“To answer your question,” she continued: “Yes. I am Kiara. I know the snot-nosed brat over there.” She jerked her chin at Guendalfa.

“Snot nosed? I’m already 22!” retorted Guendalfa

“Quiet you!” yelled Kiara. “Everyone under 40 is a snot-nosed brat to me. So, who’s the girl?”

“Master Kiara,” said Guendalfa, surprised. “Have you not heard of the Black Lightning Princess?”

“Lady Kiara just woke up today,” said the maid who guided us to this room. “For the past twenty days Lady Kiara has been in a coma.”

*Holy shit! A coma for twenty days!? If she was out for that long it’s not too surprising that she hasn’t heard of Fran yet.*

I took a closer look and saw that her cheeks were a little sunken and her lips were really dry. Her arms looked rather thin and brittle, indicating that they had been out of use.

“She is-” began the maid, but Kiara interrupted her.

“Hold up.” She gestured to Fran and said in a gentle voice, “Come here dear.” Fran trotted over to the bedside.

“What’s your name?”

“Fran.”

Kiara opened her arms and Fran embraced her. At first it was a light hug but after a few seconds, Kiara suddenly pulled Fran tightly into her.

“All these years I feared that the goal I sought was unachievable,” she said. “Now I have proof of success standing right before me. Thank you Fran, for coming to me and showing me that my journey was not meaningless.”

Kiara buried her face into Fran’s shoulder. I felt my heart twist when I heard what she said. Her whisper, which carried the weight of 50 years of doubt,

uncertainty, and resolve, seemed to reverberate throughout the room.

After a few moments of silence, Kiara eventually calmed down and released Fran.

“Can you give me the details?” asked Kiara. “How did you do it? Unless there is some reason you can’t tell me. I won’t force you.”

“Of course,” Fran nodded. “But heard Granny Kiara should already know method.”

“Who told you that?”

“Dias”

“Wha...? So he still remembers me...?”

“Nn. Aurel and Rumina too.”

Kiara’s eyes began to waver, and she smiled.

“Those fools,” she said. “They should have forgotten me and moved on long ago.”

“They didn’t. Always looking for you,” said Fran.

Kiara sighed, “What I have is just a hypothesis. Let me get more comfortable first.”

Kiara turned and got out of the bed. Guendalfa frantically held his hand out but she shooed him away and sat herself down in her armchair.

“So it all started back in the day in Ulmutt. I ventured into the depths of a dungeon, only to discover that its master was an evolved black catkin,” she said. “That was how I met Rumina 50 years ago. She was really too sweet for her own good. She offered to help me evolve, but her method was too contrived. It required her to turn herself into an evil being.”

Fran blinked.

“Turn into evil being, how?”

“In the past, one of the Black Cat Tribe’s chiefs invoked a ritual to drown our species in the power of the Evil God,” said Kiara. “It was for something stupid like for the sake of strengthening the tribe. Like many members of the tribe, Rumina had also been caught up in the ritual’s processes. She too had the power of the Evil God embedded into her.”

She grimaced at this point.

“So she told me to stand back, and I did, and suddenly my Evil Presence Detection skill went crazy. I felt a disgusting presence coming from Rumina, one that only grew stronger and stronger as I stared it down. She was probably using her powers as a dungeon master to unlock some tainted part of her soul or something. Anyway, I knew whatever she was doing was bad news, so I ran over and punched her. Told her that I didn’t want to evolve if it meant losing a friend. And that was the end of that.”

“Turn into evil being?” asked Fran.

“I wanted to find that out myself,” said Kiara. “After thinking about it, I recalled the research I did on our clan’s inability to evolve. There was a lot of misinformation being spread about at the time. Some of it was by our own tribe members trying to save face or keep the morale of the younger kinsman up. Some of it was spread by blue catkin that just wanted to mess with us. And there wasn’t much written evidence wherever I searched.”

She sighed.

“One of the few items that came to mind was an old, torn-up scroll that was barely readable. The parts that I could read said that our tribe invoked the Gods’ wrath and we were cursed. We needed to defeat something on the level of the Evil God to break that curse. I think Rumina was trying to become that evil thing herself. She wanted to let me defeat her so that I would evolve.”

Kiara folded her arms and leaned back as she wrapped up her explanation.

“So, that’s my theory,” she said. “How does that match up to your experiences?”



## Chapter 278: Kiara's Circumstances

Fran spoke up after Kiara finished talking about her journey and her understanding of evolving black catkin.

"Got it," said Fran. "Kiara not wrong, but more than one way."

"What! There was more than one way?"

"Mhmm. Kiara's way would redeem entire tribe. Must kill one S ranked evil being with only black catkin. But two easier ways to just evolve self. First, kill 1000 evil beings. Second, solo kill 1 A ranked evil being."

"That's it?"

"Nn."

Kiara's shoulders began to tremble. I thought she was about to cry or something, so her next actions took me by surprise.

"Kukukuku... Ahahahahahahaha!"

Kiara grinned, threw her head back, and roared with laughter. Her eyes teared up as she pushed up on the sides of the armchair and jumped onto her feet.

"Mia! Bring me my sword!"

Fran blinked a few times in surprise. Guendalfa's eyes shot wide open. The maid, however, was unperturbed.

"What are you planning, Lady Kiara?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Kiara let out a fierce grin. "I'm going to beat the shit out of 1000 goblins."

"You have to be kidding me," said the maid. "It was only yesterday that you were still in a coma."

"You think a couple of goblins will get the best of me just because I didn't get a little rest? Not a chance! I can kick their asses all day any day!"

Guendalfa tried to usher Kiara back into her seat but she darted right past him towards the closet. Her belongings clattered about as she rummaged through its contents.

“It must have been fate that brought Fran here to see me the day I open my eyes again,” said Kiara. “I will not let this chance pass me by. All these years, I’ve been wondering why that detestable beast lord didn’t kill me even though I held the secrets of evolving black catkin. Now I understand: he didn’t need to kill me at all. What I knew was the hardest way to evolve as a black catkin. Nothing would’ve come of it even if I had spread the news. No one could’ve possibly pulled it off. Knowing would only have brought my people despair. But now things are different. I can do it. I can finally evolve. All I have to do is kick the shit out of a couple goblins, and I’ll be done.”

“But you aren’t as able as you were before,” said Guendalfa. “You’ve even lost your blessing!”

“Blessing?” asked Fran.

“Right, you wouldn’t know,” said Kiara. She turned to us while still holding onto an old belt. “For a very long time I held the Blessing of the Warrior God.”

“Ohh! Amazing!” Fran clapped.

“Right? I’ve already passed it down to another, but I’m still quite the fighter without it.”

I had no idea what this blessing thing was.

*“What’s this Blessing of the Warrior God thing anyway?”*

*“Nn. Very famous skill.”*

Fran’s explanation left me in shock. Blessing of the Warrior God was an extra skill with world wide renown. The basics were that it gave its user a flat increase to all stat values. It also doubled the stat values gained upon each level up. But the most famous part of the skill was the condition required for retaining it. Once each month, the skill’s bearer had to put his or her life on the line in combat. The exact definition of “life on the line,” was not well known, but something on the level of beating up a bunch of back-alley grunts wouldn’t cut it. If this condition was not fulfilled even once, the skill will leave its user and pass itself onto another.

“I first got it when I was seven years old,” continued Kiara. “I had to keep fighting and fighting in order not to lose it. I got pretty strong because of that. I managed to hold onto it for five whole decades. Sadly, I lost it about ten years back.”

“Lost it, why?” asked Fran.

“There was a time I was bedridden for six months due to illness. Because I was confined and couldn’t fight, the skill moved on from me.”

“But how keep skill while slave?”

“Oh that? When I was still working at the castle, once a month they would let me hunt monsters near the capital. That way I would keep my blessing. Slaves with extra skills were pretty valuable back in they day.”

Kiara grinned.

“So yes, I’ve lost my blessing, but I don’t give a damn. I’ve been training for decades for this moment. I will not let anyone stop me!”

## Chapter 279: Kiara's Social Status

Kiara addressed Fran after she finished rummaging through her closet.

"First, we head towards Schwartzkatze! We gotta tell everyone that us black catkin can evolve."

"Everyone in the village has already been informed while you were asleep," said Guendalfa.

"Excellent! I'm sure those that are interested in evolving have already started recruiting party members to hunt evil beings. I shall join them at once."

"Schwartzkatze?" Fran tilted her head.

"It's a village of black catkin," explained Guendalfa. "After being freed from slavery, many black catkin either lost their homes or couldn't make the journey back to their hometowns. The village was built as a place where they could recover their livelihoods in a safe environment."

"Yeah, you should come with me and show your face around," said Kiara to Fran. "Everyone will probably love you."

With that, Kiara headed towards the door but was stopped by the maid who grabbed her by the arm.

"I won't let you go," she said. "You've been bedridden for almost twenty days. You need to rest for at least another week."

"Ugh. Dammit Mia! Let me go!"

Kiara tugged on her arm but it would not budge no matter how much she struggled. She even grabbed the edge of the doorway to help pull herself through but all that did was make the doorway bend and creak.

*Holy shit! That maid is strong! Aren't Kiara's stats supposed to be massive since she gets double the normal stat growth from that blessing she had? Goddamn dude, that maid hasn't moved an inch! Wait that maid's already evolved!?*

"These royal maids really do live up to their reputations," said Guendalfa. "Famous?"

“Definitely. Royal maids are the cream of the crop, hand picked to serve the royal family and guests of honor. They are selected from an early age and trained extensively in etiquette, housekeeping, hospitality, and even combat. I’d get totally slaughtered if I tried picking a fight with any one of them.”

Having given up on struggling against Mia, Kiara turned to Fran.

“Oh, so by the way, I heard that you came here by boat from the other country. How was the weather on your journey?”

“Nn. Good.”

An awkward silence followed. Kiara gave her arm a quick tug but the maid still gripped it tightly.

*She tried to distract the maid with small talk! How embarrassing!*

“...So what did you come here for?” asked Kiara sheepishly.

“Came here to meet Kiara. And one more person.”

*“Wait Fran. I don’t think you should mention the god-tier blacksmith. The Beast Lord said that all info on him was supposed to be classified...”*

*“I know.”* She replied telepathically. *“Won’t say more.”*

“I see,” said Kiara. “Well I wish I could help you more since you’re a black catkin like me, but I don’t think I can. I might live in a fancy room like this but I have no influence outside of that doorway.”

“Nonsense,” said Mia. “There is almost no one who would oppose your will, Lady Kiara.”

“Hmph. Anyone that listens to an old crank like me should throw themselves in jail.”

“I’m sure they would if you asked them to.”

*Wow. Mia seems pretty relaxed for a royal maid. She isn’t as uptight as the other maids we’ve met.*

“But seriously,” Mia continued, “You cannot call yourself unimportant after providing many of the country’s most important individuals with your teachings. The Beast Lord, the Princess, the generals, the royal maids, the castle guards. Many of us spent our entire childhood under your care, and we would come running to your bedside if you called.”

“Damn I messed up,” said Kiara. “I shouldn’t have trained you so hard when you were younger if I knew you were going to get strong enough to stop me at this point!”

“Too bad. You’ll have to be more careful next time.”

“Nrrrggh!”

“Give it up. You’re not in top shape right now. The adrenaline rush you are having is keeping you from noticing that fact.”

“Haaah.”

“You don’t have to exert yourself right this minute. The evil beings aren’t going to vanish anytime soon. Have someone at the top lay out the groundwork for you. I was not kidding when I said that half the castle would come running if you called.”

“Fine.” The tension in Kiara vanished. “Mia, go and get me someone decently competent from the castle.”

“As you wish.”

Mia let go of Kiara, took out a piece of paper, wrote down a small message, and handed it off to a maid waiting outside the door.

Kiara straightened out her clothing.

“Fran, I know I said this before, but I’m very grateful that you came here to see me. You are truly a light in my life. I would like to do something for you to express my thanks. As you can see, I have a fair bit of unofficial power in this castle.”

“No need. Didn’t do for thanks.”

“Hah! Good answer. But I’m not asking out of any sense of obligation. I just want to do something for you. It really can be anything, ya know? For example, I don’t mind permanently removing somebody you consider an eyesore.”

“No thanks. Would do that myself.”

“Really? No, you’re right. It’s more fun to do it by yourself.”

“Nn.”

Dias was right. Fran and Kiara do get along in weird ways. Both are female black catkin warriors that could casually talk about assassinating someone they didn’t like.

Fran and Kiara continued to chat about some rather concerning topics,

stopping only after they were interrupted by a knock outside the door.

“Excuse me. Did you call for me, Madam Kiara?”

“Yeah, come in.”

An old man entered the room. He had silvery gray hair and was wearing an embroidered vestment robe. He spoke cheerfully.

“Madam Kiara, I have come to answer your call.”

“There you are. I was wanting to introduce you to someone.”

“Oh?” he turned to Fran. “You must be the Black Lightning Princess.”

“What? You already know of her?”

“Of course. I think you were the only person in the country that didn’t.”

The man bowed elegantly to Fran.

“Greetings, my lady. Forgive me for not introducing myself earlier. My name is Raymond, and I hold the position of Prime Minister of this country.”

*Holy shit! I knew he looked important, but he’s actually the Prime Minister!?  
Kiara really knows how to throw her weight around.*

“C ranked adventurer, Fran. Sometimes called Black Lightning Princess.”

“Stop it with the excessive bowing already,” said Kiara. “You made it to Prime Minister, so if you keep on lowering your head people will stop respecting your position. Hold your head up high and keep your eyes looking forward. ”

“That was simply due to the grace of the current beast lord. At heart, I am simply a humble public servant.” He turned back to Fran. “I was previously informed of your circumstances by His Majesty and was told to accommodate your needs during your stay. I will also get that letter of recommendation to that person written as you requested. Is there anything else you require of me?”

Fran spoke to me telepathically.

*“Master. Anything?”*

*“Nothin’ from me. You?”*

*“Just one. Want to visit black catkin village.”*

*“Sounds good to me. Go for it.”*

Fran told Raymond her request.

“Understood,” he said. “Truth be told, I was actually going to ask you to visit Schwartzkatze. Your request is most timely. I have a map already prepared for you.”

“Thanks.”



## Chapter 280: Greengoat

Raymond opened up a large map and handed it over to Fran.

“Schwarzkatz is located near the foot of these mountains that serve as our border,” he said. “It’s a three to four day journey by horned carriage, but I suspect that you have means of covering that distance more quickly. In that case, I suggest that you make a stop at Greengoat. It is one of the country’s largest trading hubs. Many major roads converge on it.”

“Nn. Thanks.”

“And here is that letter of recommendation that the Beast Lord instructed me to write for you.” He handed Fran a letter adorned with a fancy wax seal.

“I believe that is everything on the agenda. If you have no further concerns, I shall excuse myself here. May your journey be safe and prosperous.”

Raymond exited the room. He was gone and we had everything we came for, so it was time for us to go too.

“Will be leaving too,” said Fran.

“Aww, already?” asked Kiara.

“Nn. Bye Kiara, Guen.”

“Bye Fran,” said Guendalfa. “And uhh... about that thing... when we first met...”

“Nn. No problem. I forgive you.”

“Hmm? What’s this?” said Kiara. “Why is she forgiving you, brat? What did you do to her?”

“N-Nothing! I didn’t do any-”

“Guen picked a fight”

“Gahhhhh!” Guendalfa covered his head with his hands and cowered down on the floor.

Fran explained in detail our first encounter with Guendalfa, starting with him being an arrogant son of a bitch and ending with Fran flooring him with a single punch. After listening to our story, Kiara directed a furious gaze at Guendalfa.

“I can’t believe you!” she shouted, drilling her fist into the top of his skull

“Why are you still so obsessed with your uncle?”

“I’m not obsessed!” he stammered. “I couldn’t care less about that traitor. He-”  
“*That* right there is what makes you a goddamn snot nosed brat! You’re over 20 years old and you’re *still* throwing a tantrum over Gold leaving. It’s an honor to serve the Beast Lord, and you shouldn’t think of it any other way.”

“But-”

“No buts! Stop being so goddamn immature. I know you’re just mad he left the tribe without telling you first. Get over it already.”

“Urk...”

Guendalfa couldn’t find a way to retort, so he just sat angrily on the floor with a frown on his face. Kiara turned to the maid, Mia.

“Mia. Get this snot nosed brat out of my room.”

“Understood, Lady Kiara.”

Mia grabbed Guendalfa by the collar and dragged him out the room. Kiara turned back to Fran and gave her a hug.

“Do come back and visit,” she said.

“Nn. Kiara, don’t push self to hard.”

“Hahaha! I can’t promise you that. I’m trying to evolve, after all.”

“Nn. Then push self just enough to avoid death.”

*It seems both Kiara and Fran are the type of people to constantly push themselves to their limits to achieve their goals. I can protect Fran along the way but the same can’t be said for Kiara. I hope she stays safe, for Fran’s sake.*

“I won’t die,” said Kiara. “I haven’t felt this alive in years!”

She shifted towards the open door.

“In fact, I feel so great that why don’t I just get a head start on evil beings. I think I’ll just accompany you an-”

“Not so fast, Lady Kiara.” Mia suddenly appeared behind Kiara and grabbed her by the shoulder.

“Goddammit Mia! Let me go! How did you even get back here that fast? I thought I told you to remove that snot nosed brat.”

“I had a feeling that you would try to bolt while I was away so I just dumped him in the hallway around the corner.”

“Nrrrgh!”

After a brief struggle, Kiara gave up trying to escape the maid.  
“It looks like I can’t go, so won’t you stay with me a bit longer?” she said.  
“Can’t. Need to leave.”  
“I see.” Kiara smiled gently. “In that case, do visit again!”  
“Will do!”

With that, we exited Kiara’s room. We turned the corner and found Guendalfa still sitting on the ground and sulking, so Fran asked him to escort us out. Guendalfa seemed to perk right back up and he happily accompanied us out of the castle and stuck with us all the way until we reached the city’s front gates.

“Well then. Be safe, Black Lightning Princess.”  
“Nn. You too. Stop picking fights.”  
“Haha yeah. I kinda learned my lesson the hard way.”

Once outside, Fran summoned Urushi in his large form and mounted him.  
“Go Urushi! Go!”  
“Woof!”

Urushi raced through the sky. We left the capital around noon. Only after travelling for about eight hours could we finally see some city lights emerging from beyond the horizon.

*“It’s pretty late Fran. I think that’s Greengoat in the distance. Let’s touch down there and find an inn where we can have a meal and get some rest. We can continue travelling in the morning.”*  
“Nn. Urushi, descend.”

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2 hours later, Fran lay contentedly on the bed, just having finished dinner.  
*What the hell was that? We got through this city way too smoothly! Nobody batted an eye when we arrived at the town gate and the guard let us through without issue. Nobody gave us shit at the guild when we were selling our monster mats either. Nor were we disturbed during the check in process. I swear to god, I’m so used to Fran getting harassed that being left alone actually bothers me more. Oh shit, did I just totally jinx it? Is something terrible going to*

*happen to Greengoat now?*

“Master, what’s wrong?” asked Fran, half asleep.

*“Nothing really big. I think it’s odd that no one in Greengoat’s messed with us yet.”*

“Is that a bad thing?”

*“It’s not. I’ll let it go.”*

I decided to put the matter aside and let Fran get some rest. Surprisingly, the next morning was just as uneventful. We managed to set off from Greengoat without a hitch.

*So nothing actually happened while we were in Greengoat? Well damn, I guess there really is a first time for everything after all.*

As soon as I thought that, Fran and I spotted two adventurers standing on either side of the road about twenty meters from where we were. They weren’t doing anything besides just loitering around and suspiciously scouring their surroundings. We were currently riding Urushi so we slowed down and kept our guard up because they directed their gazes at us, but again, nothing happened. As we passed them we saw that the two adventurers were not beastkin, but human. I thought we were in the clear after we passed them by, but then three more adventures on horseback appeared from the side of the road and stopped in front of us, blocking our way forward. Two more came out and stopped behind us. We were surrounded.

“Whew. We managed to make it here in time!” said one.

“Yeah! What the hell is that wolf? It’s crazy fast!”

“The guys on the ground should have signalled us sooner.”

One of the men dismounted.

“Oi you! Are you Fran, the Black Lightning Princess?” said one of the adventurers.

“Nn.”

He made an ugly smile. The other 4 adventurers dismounted and moved inwards, tightening the circle around Fran.

*Are these guys seriously attacking us when Urushi is out in the open? He’s*

*even in his large form. Are they brave? Or just plain stupid?*

“Well then. It may be a bit sudden but you will forfeit your life here!”

“If you want to curse something, then curse the day you were born a beastkin!”

The five adventurers each reached into their bags and pulled out a large purple ball. I appraised them.

*“Fran! Those balls create poisonous chunks of fog that weakens everything in them. It’s probably too weak to affect you but I think I’ll teleport you out just in case. Urushi. You have the Nullify Poison skill. Go waste them.”*

*“Woof”*

The men threw the balls straight at Fran but I teleported her high into the sky before they reached. The adventurers’ stats were so low that I felt like I was watching them in slow motion. After missing their target, the balls exploded, covering the area below us with a thick purple fog.

“Did we get her?” said one of the men.

The next moment an enormous black shadow emerged from the fog and scooped up the man in its jaws. After violently shaking its head side to side a few times, the shadow loosened its grip and sent the man’s chewed up corpse flying.

“Hiiii-!”

The other four turned tail and ran but Urushi was much too fast for them. Two of the men got their heads bitten off and the other two were pinned under his massive paws. The first two men who were monitoring the road were pierced by spears of Darkness Magic.

I checked our surroundings as we descended to see if there were any more attackers, but it was just those seven.

“Good boy!” said Fran.

“Wooooof!”

Five out of the seven men were dead. The last two were bound to bleed out within a couple minutes. I quickly healed them but left them under Urushi’s paws. Fran kicked them awake. They put up some resistance but our tried and

true process of Fran beating them half to death then healing them over and over made them quickly loosen their tongues.

“I really don’t know who hired us! I never saw his face!”

“The guy just left us the money as well as these poison balls.”

“Told us that these could subdue even the mightiest beastkin.”

“He fucking lied to us!”

“Please don’t kill me! I was set up!”

“Master. What do?”

*“I think we should take them to the guards. They aren’t a threat anymore and they don’t seem to have any more companions, so it’s safe to hand them over. They were probably disposable pawns or something. I’m not too sure why they were actually after us in the first place, but if I had to guess, I’d say they were probably just sent out to harass you. There’s no way anyone with half a brain could expect goons on their level to take us out.”*

“Nn okay.”

We headed back to town with the two goons hanging limply from Urushi’s mouth.

“Master, something wrong?” Fran tilted her head as we closed in on the city’s gates.

“N-Nah, it’s nothing. Don’t worry about it.”

“Nn. Okay.”

*Holy crap, I can’t believe she almost noticed. I can’t tell her that being attacked by these guys actually made me feel relieved...*

## Chapter 281: Regarding the Failed Attempt on the Black Lightning Princess' Life

We walked back to Greengoat with the two remaining adventurers hanging from Urushi's mouth. We were greeted by one of the guards as we approached to the gate.

"Didn't you just leave?" he asked.

"Nn. Dealt with business."

"Wait... What's with those two guys being dragged by your wolf?"

"Business. They attacked me. Here to turn them in."

"Y-You were attacked!? Are you hurt in any way?"

"No."

The guard gave a sigh of relief.

"Thank God! This is definitely strange though. There shouldn't be any bandits in these parts anymore. The Beast Lord subjugated them all last year."

"Not bandits. Assassins. Were targeting me specifically."

"Assassins!? P-Please wait a moment. I must notify my superiors immediately."

He turned to the other guard. "Go get the squad leader immediately!"

"Yes sir!"

The second guard took off. We handed the two adventurers to the remaining guard, who tied them up, dragged them to the guard tower, and dumped them into a jail cell. By the time he returned, so had his partner, their boss in tow.

"Black Lightning Princess!" said the squad leader. "Are you unharmed?"

"Nn. Unharmed."

"That's good news." He turned to the guard that had stayed. "You! What's the status report!"

The guard recounted to the chief everything that we told him and that he had thrown the assassins in prison.

"I see." The squad leader turned to Fran. "Rest assured, we will find those responsible for this despicable attack immediately. I will also have this matter

conveyed to the town's lord right away. May I serve you some tea in the meantime?

"Nn."

He guided us over to the guard tower and ushered us through the front entrance. After climbing a set of stairs, we were seated in a reception room. Compared to the reception mansion in the capital this room was quite shabby, but it was probably the best room that they had.

"Oi you lot!" shouted the squad leader. "Go grab the finest tea that we have! And something for her to eat!"

"Yes sir!"

One of the guards at the entrance dashed back downstairs. After a few minutes, he returned carrying a tray with a teapot, a porcelain tea cup, some first flush tea, and an assortment of jams and honey. The guard poured a cup of tea and handed it to Fran alongside the honey and a spoon.

"Is it to your liking?" asked the squad leader.

"Nn. Not bad," said Fran.

"Thank you very much!"

Two more guards entered the room carrying a large platter with a silver covering right as Fran finished her first cup of tea. They gently placed the platter in front of Fran and removed the lid.

*What the hell!? What's up with that massive steak!? Are they seriously serving that with tea?*

Nobody else in the room seemed to share my disbelief. Fran happily munched on the steak as the rest of the beastkin guards stood by just in case she had any sort of request. It seemed that, to beastkin, steak and tea were a natural pair.

*I guess being a glutton is a beastkin trait, not exclusive to Fran. Wait, Fran could probably down two or three of those so she's probably considered a glutton even among beastkin.*

Fran was approaching her last bite when we could hear the sound of heavy footsteps racing up the stairs. The footsteps stopped short of the door, and then the person quietly knocked on the door, as if they remembered their



manners at the last minute.

“Enter,” said Fran.

“Please excuse my intrusion. Are you the Black Lightning Princess?”

“Nn.”

“I am Marmanno, lord of the city of Greengoat.”

The man spoke with a loud voice that filled the room. He was a large man with bulging muscles and had a large sword hanging by his waist. I quickly appraised him and saw that his species was green goatkin.

*What the heck? He doesn't look like a goat. And did he name the freaking town after himself!?*

“I received word of what happened and decided to take a look at the situation directly.” He turned to the squad leader. “What’s the latest status update?”  
“Sir! My subordinates have reported that we are currently interrogating the suspects.”

“Basharian bastards,” said the goatkin. “I’m certain it was them.”

“I concur,” said the squad leader.

“Get them to speak even if you have to pry their finger nails off to do it! Don’t let the mastermind escape. Capture him by all means necessary if you find him. He had the gall to attack the Black Lightning Princess, a veritable hero, so make sure he pays the price!!”

*Wow, this burly ass dude considers Fran a hero? He's not even a black catkin.*

“Roger that sir,” replied the squad leader. “I have already dispatched soldiers to the scene of the crime.”

“Very good. What about searching the city for suspicious characters?”

“That...” the squad leader faltered. “I’ve already sent two squads to locations in the town where ruffians are known to gather, but we just don’t have the manpower to search the entire city. Most of the garrison has been deployed to the Basharian border.”

“Damn those Basharian bastards!” bellowed the goatkin, slamming his fist onto the table. “Deploy the knights. Have them comb this city from top to bottom!”

“Is that okay sir? Wouldn’t that compromise the security of the castle?”

“That is of little concern! They harmed the Black Lightning Princess! I will make

those Basharian bastards pay! No matter the cost!”

*I doubt that searching the city will turn up any additional clues. If all the mastermind wanted to do was harass Fran, then by now they would have skipped town. Though, it looks like the lord and his guards are getting fired up, so it'd probably be best for me to hold my tongue for now. It would be rude of me to dampen their enthusiasm.*

“So Black Lightning Princess,” said Marmanno, “would you stay with us until we finish investigating these assassins? I will host you in my mansion and provide you the most luxurious accommodations I can offer. We can dine together and trade stories from the battlefield. What say you?”

*“Master, what do?”* asked Fran telepathically.

*“I think we should turn him down. He seems like an honest guy but we don't have the time to sit around and wait for them to catch a criminal that's probably no longer in town.”*

*“Nn. Okay.”*

Fran gently declined and we made our way out of the guard tower and through the gates of the city. Once outside, Fran brought out Urushi and mounted him.

*“It looks like we got held up a bit, but whatever. Let's go!”*

*“Ohh!”*

Urushi started speeding northwards from Greengoat. He was running faster than normal trying to make up for lost time. After travelling for a few hours, we spotted a river at the foot of the mountain range.

*“Master. Up there. That river.”*

*“Yeah. Right beyond that river is Schwartzkatze. But we shouldn't cross it just yet.”*

*“Why?”*

*“It's just in case we're being tracked by the same dude that sent those assassins. Let's throw them off our trail.”*

I had Urushi double back and head south for a bit before turning eastward and making a wide circle around the village. Once we were north of the village, we ran forward for a little ways before ducking behind some bushes. I then

teleported all three of us back to where we first saw the river.

*“Alright. That should be good. Let’s cross that river.”*

Beyond the river, we found a crossroads with two diverging paths. We took the path going west and followed it until we found a reassuring sight.

“Master! Black catkin spotted!”

## Chapter 282: Villagers Discovered

We spotted a group of three black catkin men on our way to Schwartzkatze walking along the same path as us. Unlike Fran, all three of them were fully grown adults. They looked to be in the midst of returning from gathering firewood as bundles of sticks could be seen attached to the packs on their backs. We approached them from behind and called out to them.

“Hey,” said Fran.

“Wh-Aaaaaaaah!” One of the men turned around and then jumped back in fright when he saw Urushi.

“A-A monster! A giant wolf”

“Run away!”

The three men dropped the packs they were carrying and ran off into the distance.

“We messed up.”

*“Yeah. It was probably a bad idea to approach with Urushi in his giant wolf form. They’re members of the weakest tribe, so seeing a monster as intimidating as Urushi probably overwhelmed them.”*

“What do?”

*“Hmm. We should probably chase them down and explain the situation. Things will get hairy if they start reporting that there’s a giant wolf on the prowl.”*

“Nn.”

*“Also, Urushi we need you to stand by for a bit.”*

“Woof”

Fran hopped off of Urushi’s back and had him melt into her shadow. We decided to do the three men we’d just scared a favor and store branches they dropped in our dimensional storage. We ran down the path following their footprints until we saw their tracks split off into three directions. We then decided to start by catching the one closest to us.

*“Fran, go all out.”*

“Nn.”

Fran clad herself in wind magic and used it to boost herself towards the fleeing black catkin. She landed right in front of him, cutting him off.

“Hi again.”

“Whoa!”

He stumbled back onto the ground. His face relaxed momentarily when he saw that Fran was a black catkin just like him. But then, after looking at her for a couple more seconds, his eyes widened and he began trembling.

“A-a- a-a-....!”

“Nn?”

“E-e-e-e-e-ev...!”

“You okay?”

“AN EVOLVED BLACK CATKIN?!”

He rushed over to Fran on his hands and knees and grasped her hand tightly.

“W-w-w-w-w-w...”

“Speak normally”

“Y-y-y-y-y-y-y-...!”

“Come on.”

“Would you happen to be the Black Lightning Princess herself!?”

“Nn.”

The man collapsed onto the ground and burst into tears.

“It finally happened!” he wailed. “One of us has finally evolved! For such a long time we have suffered! It was almost as if we were cursed by misfortune itself, but *finally* we have someone from our tribe that has a promising future. Uwaaaaaaah!”

*His reaction was the most extreme out of all the beastkin we have met. Probably because he himself suffered under the curse the gods have put on the black catkin. He can probably tell she’s a Black Heavenly Tigerkin because they’re from the same tribe.*

“I’m so sorry about all the trouble I have caused you,” he said, after calming down.

“Nn, no problem.”

“Also, if you could go get the other two that are still running away. They are probably way too far away for me to catch them.”

“Got it.”

Fran used wind magic to boost herself to the other two black catkin and retrieved them. Both showed similar reactions to the first.

“You are our savior! I will follow you forever!” one wailed.

“I-I will never forget this moment for the rest of my life!” declared the other.

*They look like kittens admiring a local badass.*

After reuniting the three black catkin, we asked them if they could lead us to Schwartzkatze.

“It would be an honor to guide you to the village,” said one of the black catkin. “Let me return first and inform them that you are coming.” He seemed to want to leave immediately, but Fran stopped him before he did.

“Here,” said Fran, taking the dropped firewood out of her dimensional storage and handing it over to the remaining two black catkin.

“Ohh! Thank you very much!”

“You are so generous! Now we don’t have to go back to that forest!”

“Was that space/time magic? I thought that was the stuff of legends. As expected of the Black Lightning Princess!”

After taking his firewood back from her, the man that’d offered to act as a messenger kicked off and started running back to the village.

*If this was back in Japan they probably would have asked her to autograph the firewood.*

“Oh. Brought companion,” said Fran.

“Huh? I don’t see him.”

“Nn. Can call him?”

“Of course! The companion of the Black Lightning Princess must surely be a person worthy of our respect.”

“Urushi”

“Woof!”

“Gyaaaaah! It’s a wolf.”

“Run away!”

The two black catkin fell back when they saw Urushi in his small form. Despite no longer being a giant wolf, they were still frightened by him. Fran quickly managed to calm them down and we were able to resume our journey.

“Why so frightened?” asked Fran.

“Normal wolves are a danger for us,” said one of the men. “And it’s really obvious from his fur that your companion is not a normal wolf but a monster. Of course we would be scared!”

“My bad,” said Fran. “Big wolf from before, also Urushi.”

“Really? We should tell the villagers that the giant wolf that was spotted is not a threat. I’ll run off ahead and let them know!” A second black catkin ran off, leaving the last one to escort us.

As we walked the remaining black catkin started talking about Schwartzkatze. He explained that currently the population of the village was around 300 people. About 90% of them were black catkin, mostly civilians. The other 10% were guards, adventurers, and their families. The Beast Lord had personally arranged to have the village constructed. He ordered a solid wooden wall to be built, which is normally uncommon for such a remote village.

*He seems to be treating the black cat tribe really well. Though, a part of me feels as if he’s just doing it to make Kiara happy.*

We started to see the wooden walls emerge from beyond the horizon after walking along the road for about ten minutes. Standing in front of the wooden gate were three people. Two of them were the black catkin that ran off ahead of us. The last one was an elderly black catkin with a hunched back. The elderly man approached Fran, completely ignoring Urushi.

“Oh.... Ohhhhhhhh! It’s true! She really has evolved!” he said with wide eyes. “See? I told you so, chief” said one of the black catkin.

“And you think I could possibly believe that a member of our tribe had evolved?”

“But His Majesty the Beast Lord already sent us a messenger telling us exactly that, didn’t he?”

“And you are telling me that you completely believed that? That every fibre of your being believed those words and didn’t harbor even the slightest amount of

doubt?”

“Well...”

*It seems like not all the black catkin believed the news that one of their tribe members had evolved. The thinking that ‘it is impossible for black catkin to evolve’ was so deeply embedded into their minds that they couldn’t even believe the words of the Beast Lord himself.*

Fran stepped forward.

“It’s true,” she said. “Have evolved.”

Hearing those words and seeing her appearance, the village chief began to tremble. He finally was able to believe the reality in front of him.

“So does that mean the requirements for evolving that they told us are true?” asked the chief. “That all you have to do is defeat 1000 evil beings?”

“Nn.”

“Hooray! I thought it was too good to be true! But now more of us really can evolve.”

It took us a while to calm the excited village chief down.

*“Well, it seems like they are happy you came, which is good, I guess.”*

“Nn.”

“Woof.”



## Chapter 283: Hero or Idol?

The village chief danced around for a bit before settling down and guiding us into the village. A huge mass of people crowded around the area in front of the gate. There were at least two hundred black catkin gathered around us. Despite that large number, the crowd was awfully quiet. We could hear some murmuring alongside the occasional sob, but nobody was cheering or shouting. Most of the villagers were stunned in silence.

One of the black catkin in front of us knelt onto the ground. He clasped his hands together in prayer and stared fervently at Fran, as if she was the Messiah. One by one, the other black catkin around him followed suit. It didn't take long for the entire crowd to begin praying, with Fran as the object of their worship. The bizarre atmosphere left Fran and I bewildered.

"People, people, stop it," said the village chief. "Can't you see that you are bothering the Black Lightning Princess?"

The people around Fran awkwardly got to their feet, though they did still continue to send her their ardent stares.

"I'm sorry about that," said the village chief. "As far as we black catkin are concerned, you may as well be a walking miracle. Everyone's just acting like this because seeing you has moved their hearts. Could you forgive them?"

"Nn. No problem."

As if Fran's voice was a signal, the crowd started to buzz.

"Oh my god, she talked!"

"Her voice is so adorable!"

"She is truly divine!"

"Mommy, how do I become like her?"

The people around us were talking excitedly. They were treating Fran more like a famous idol than an adventurer or warrior. The crowd rapidly closed in on her. Everyone was trying to get a closer look at her all at once.

"Enough!" shouted the chief. He waved his hands, shooing the crowd away. "I

must show her our village's hospitality. If you would please follow me, Black Lightning Princess."

"Nn."

The crowd parted and allowed the chief to lead us to a slightly larger house in the middle of the village. A large group of black catkin trailed behind us. Most of them were kids, so I half expected them to call out to us. But none of them did. It was obvious from the looks in their eyes that they were too busy admiring Fran to remember how to use their voices.

When we got to the chief's house he sat us down and then personally brewed Fran a cup of tea. A bunch of black catkin crowded outside the window, watching her drink. I could sense that a lot more had their ears pressed to the walls.

"I apologize for being unable to serve you anything better," said the chief.

"Nn. Not problem. Tasty," said Fran, after taking a sip.

"Ohhhh! That's good to hear! Thank you for your kind words!"

The people outside the house cheered.

"These tea leaves were produced by this village. Everyone will be honored to hear that you enjoyed them."

"Nn."

*I hope Fran wasn't just providing them with lip service. What would they have done if she said it was bad? Probably have someone run off and buy expensive tea.*

"Now then." The chief sat down. "May I ask the reason for your visit?"

"Not much," said Fran. "Just wanted to see black catkin village."

"Oh I see!" The chief smiled as he nodded. "It's an honor for you to show interest in us. Please let me offer you my home for you to stay the night. There are no inns in this village and my house is the biggest here."

"Don't worry. Just a few days. Will camp outside."

"Nononono! How could I possibly allow the Black Lightning Princess herself to stay outdoors? Please, make yourself at home."

"Really? Thanks."

"If there is anything else you need, please feel free to let me know."

*This is a little troubling. We didn't come here to impose on the village. Rather, we came here to see if there was anything we could do to help.*

"Tell if any trouble," said Fran. "Will help with anything."

"I am truly happy to hear those words," said the chief. "But we could not possibly ask that of you, who has already brought so much hope to our tribe."

"It's fine," insisted Fran. "Tell me. Any monster problems?"

"We are in a secluded area that doesn't see many monsters," he explained, "so they haven't been a threat for a while. We have the beast lord to thank for finding us this location. The land isn't very fertile, and it's hard to grow crops, but at least we can live here in peace. That said," he paused, "could I ask one thing of you?"

"Nn. Happy to do anything"

"Can you show our young ones how strong you are?"

"Combat prowess?"

"Yes. It isn't possible for us old folk to hunt 1000 evil beings. We're just too old. But the younger generation has a chance. I would really appreciate it if you could show them that it's possible for us black catkin to be more than just the weakest tribe. You may even be able to inspire them to go out and hunt evil beings for themselves."

"Nn. Got it. Right now, tribe a little cowardly."

"Great! I'm glad to hear it!"

The black catkin outside of the house started kicking up a fuss right as we wrapped up the conversation. The commotion grew louder and louder until they were shouting with their voices laced with panic. And before long, someone began violently knocking on the chief's door.

"Chief! Chief are you in? It's an emergency!" the person shouted.

The chief hurried to the door and opened it.

"What is going on? You are being loud," said the chief.

"Chief it's bad! Goblins! We sighted goblins nearby the village!"

"Why are you so panicked? We have the guards. What are they doing?"

"This is more than the guards can handle!" shouted the man at the doorway.

"There are over 20 goblins!"

"What did you say? That's way too many! Schwartzekatze is doomed!"

*Hmm? Is twenty goblins alot? Maybe for a small village, I guess, but their reaction is totally overblown.*

Fran stood up.

“Will handle them,” she said. “Will show my strength.”

“Will you really take care of it for us?” asked the chief nervously.

“Nn. Have some people follow. Will put on a show.”

“Got it! I’ll send some promising fellows your way.”

The chief nodded and dashed out the house in a hurry.

## Chapter 284: A Look into How Black Catkin Are Treated In Modern Times

A single red dogkin guard led Fran and a group of around thirty black catkin towards the area that the goblins were spotted. All of the black catkin were carrying weapons, albeit crude ones. Some were stuck with just sticks or farm tools. They all wore timid expressions on their faces and their eyes nervously darted all over the place.

*What the hell? Why are they being so paranoid? All they have to do is sit around and watch Fran kill twenty goblins. Is it because they're so used to running away that they find it unthinkable for them to knowingly approach a group of monsters of their own accord?*

"Anyone, combat experience?" asked Fran.

The black catkin all shook their heads vigorously.

"Never sent to fight Bashar?" asked Fran

"No we were never sent," answered a black catkin. "The beastkin country doesn't conscript black catkin. Our tribe's too weak to fight."

"Other tribes no complaints?"

"They don't. All the other tribes consider us a nuisance on the battlefield. They all say 'don't bother coming'. We couldn't contribute anything at all even if we did insist on joining."

"Before we were actually used as meatshields," said another black catkin. "But that was in the past when slavery was still a thing. The Beast Lord quickly banned the practice once he freed all of us. We are grateful to him for that."

"Yeah. So basically, outside of being a meatshield, we are useless in a fight."

*I was expecting that there would be at least one or two decent warriors among the black catkin living in the beastkin country. There's a whole ton of them living here, after all. But looks like I was wrong. Rather, the exceptional black catkin seemed to be those that travelled outside the beastkin country like Fran's parents or Kiara. The black catkin that live here are so cowardly that it's almost kinda heartbreaking.*

“Treated poorly?” asked Fran.

“Not really anymore. Before, when we were slaves, times were tough. But now that we are free, the other tribes don’t harm us directly anymore. But they still look down on us.”

“It’s not like we look down upon you,” chimed in the red dogkin leading the expedition. “You know how it is. Black catkin being weak is just a fact. Like how the sky is blue and the grass is green. Common sense says that it’s only natural for black catkin to be weak.”

*Judging by his expression, he really doesn’t think anything malicious about the black catkin. It’s just that he grew up believing that the whole race was weak. The idea was probably reinforced by the fact that all the tribes except the black catkin were capable of evolution.*

“But looking at you makes me feel like I should reconsider,” said the red dogkin. “I can’t wait to see you in action.”

*The guard seemed to acknowledge that black catkin did in fact have potential, but sadly, his opinion didn’t seem particularly widespread. Fran’s strength didn’t look like it would change everyone’s perception of the black catkin race as a whole.*

15 minutes after departing from Schwartzkatz, we arrived at the area where the goblins were spotted. We found ourselves in a wilderness sparsely populated by trees. The soil in the area around the black catkin village was poor. It simply didn’t have enough nutrients to support a dense woodland.

“This place, huh,” remarked one of the black catkin.

“This place? Something wrong?” asked Fran.

“You see, there was a period of time that we wanted to cultivate crops and such around here,” he explained. “Since our race is weak, we didn’t have the manpower to deforest the entire area around the village. We could only cut down a few trees at a time and try to make do with a small area. When we found this clearing, we thought we would be able to build some big farms here, but it turned out that the soil was not fertile enough to grow anything.”

The black catkin around him looked sadly at the ground. He continued.

“There are more fertile lands a bit further north, but those places are too cold

for us to bear. Also, they are infested with monsters.”

“Speaking of monsters, I see the goblins,” said the red dogkin.

Fran quickly ushered the group to hide behind a large boulder. We spotted the group of goblins marching southwards in a rocky area up ahead. They would definitely come across the village if they kept their current course. The goblins were equipped with iron armor and were holding metal weapons like swords and spears.

*That’s odd. Goblins usually aren’t that well armed. Most of the time goblins wear loincloths and carry around sticks. At best they tend to have the leather armor that they would loot off adventurers every now and then. But the only time I’ve seen goblins wearing legit armor was back in Alessa during the Goblin Stampede. And even then, the only ones that had it were hobgoblins. Is there supposed to be a dungeon nearby or something?*

“Those goblins are way too well armed,” said the red dogkin. “They must have stolen their equipment from a group of bandits or mercenaries.”

“Goblins too weak for that,” said Fran.

“No, not if the group was bigger. If the mercenaries or bandits were too severely outnumbered, the goblins probably could have done them in. It would make sense if that group over there is all that was left of what started off as a larger horde.”

*“It should still be a cakewalk,”* I told her telepathically. *“These are just still normal goblins, and I am not detecting any reinforcements in the vicinity. Go wreck them.”*

“Got it.”

Fran stepped out from behind the boulder and turned to the crowd of black catkin behind her.

“Going now. Will eliminate goblins. Watch me.”

The crowd stared at her nervously.

“Please don’t go!”

“Don’t abandon us!”

“Don’t worry,” said Fran. “Urushi staying here.”

“Woof!”

Urushi popped out of Fran's shadow and trotted over to the huddling villagers. Their faces relaxed when they saw that the big black wolf would be guarding them.

*I'm glad that the villagers are no longer afraid of Urushi. They warmed up to him after seeing him being friendly and happily interacting with Fran.*

"Will be quick," said Fran.

"A-Alright."

"Please be safe!"

"W-We'll be watching."

Fran left the villagers and stealthily approached the goblins under the cover of the rocky terrain.

*"You should hold back a bit. You want to demonstrate your strength at an extent that the villagers can actually see it."*

"Nn. Awakening. Brilliant Lightning Rush!"

Black lightning bolts sizzled around Fran's body. Her tail changed from solid black to black with gray stripes and stuck out like a lightning bolt. A cloud of dust to whipped up around her.

*"What did I just say about holding back!?"*

"Nn. Cooler this way. Will slowly demonstrate sword skills."

*"Alright then."*

Fran unsheathed me and slowly walked up to the goblins. The goblins noticed her and began eyeing her. Three of them approached her with swords drawn and their tongues hanging from their mouths. With three smooth strokes, Fran cut those goblins down. The remaining goblins, now seeing her as a threat, surrounded her with their weapons ready. Three more goblins lunged at her, but she stabbed the first through the chest after ducking under his blow, then spun around and beheaded the other two as they tried to attack her back. To the onlookers, she moved so effortlessly and gracefully that it looked like she was performing a dance.

*"Welp. The goblin's formation is already starting to collapse. Wait. Doesn't that one on the ground look more nicely dressed than the others? You probably defeated their leader without even noticing."*



“Nn. Will use flashy magic now.”

While the goblin’s were caught between either fighting or fleeing, Fran fired Tri-Explosion towards the edge of the goblin’s formation. There was a great flash of light and one goblin was instantly vaporized. The two around him were blown a great distance away, their charred bodies tumbling on the rocky ground.

The remaining eleven goblins turned around and fled at full speed. But Fran was too quick for them.

“Stun Bolt. Stun Bolt. Stun Bolt.”

“Gyaaoooooh!”

“Gyooooaaoo!”

Fran paralyzed the leftover goblins by firing weak lightning magic at them. After the final goblin hit the ground, Fran inspected their convulsing bodies.

*“You’re not going to kill them?”*

“Nn. Will make others finish them off.”

*“Oh nice idea! That’s a great way to give them some confidence and experience.”*

“Nn,” she said smugly.

*“I think it’s safe now. You should go get them.”*

As we walked back towards the group of huddling black catkin, I took one last look at the twitching goblins.

*I hope that the black catkin have the guts to finish them off. Hopefully their feral and ferocious side hasn’t been completely extinguished.*

## Chapter 285: A Crash Course on Killing Goblins

We returned to the boulder where all the other beastkin were hiding. There, we found everyone was staring at us with stunned expressions on their faces.

“Everyone, over here,” said Fran.

“O-Okay.”

The group obediently followed Fran. They began to murmur the moment they saw the many goblins that had been strewn across the undergrowth.

“A-Amazing!”

“As expected of the Black Lightning Princess!”

“Man! Evolved black catkin are awesome!”

“Now I get why there is so much hype around evolving.”

The red dogkin guard approached Fran.

“I was right not to judge you like other black catkin,” he said. “You really do live up to your reputation.”

He kept his expression calm and composed, but his tail was wagging like mad and his eyes were burning with admiration. He was clearly just as excited and impressed as everyone else.

Suddenly a scream ripped through our surroundings.

“Aiieee! This one’s still alive”

“What? Oh no! That one is too!”

“We’re all gonna die!!”

The surrounding black catkin finally noticed that some of the goblins were still breathing. They all paled at the thought that they were casually standing around monsters that were still alive.

“Left alive for you,” said Fran. “Finish them.”

“What?”

“Letting you kill,” repeated Fran.

“What!? Why?”

The black catkin responded with shock. Many even seemed devastated. It was

almost as if they thought Fran had betrayed them.

“Goblins, evil beings. Kill for evolution. Also confidence, ” said Fran.

None of the black catkin responded. They all just continued staring at her in mute horror.

*Well, they’ve probably never held weapons before, so they probably lack the mental strength to instantly kill something on command. The most they’ve probably done is hunt. They don’t have the strong, warrior-like mentality shared by Fran and most other beastkin.*

“Quick,” chided Fran. “Paralysis running out.”

“O-Oh lord!”

“You three!” She pointed at three young black catkin at the edge of the group.

“Do it.”

The three black catkin jumped back in surprise, almost dropping their weapons.

“No way! Hitting monsters is scary!.”

“I’ll d-do it tomorrow. I promise.”

“I’ve never held a weapon in my life! Please spare me!”

“No!” Fran took an intimidating step forward. “Do it. Now.”

“But-”

“Paralysis wearing out.”

“A-Anything but that!”

“Now!”

“Y-Yes ma’am!” One of the young black catkin lurched forward towards the goblins. His fear had buckled under Fran’s intimidating glare.

“You two. Follow him,” said Fran.

“Oh god, why did it come to this?”

“W-We’ve got no choice but to do it.”

*Goblins are the Evil God’s subordinates. If anything, it would be morally wrong not to kill them off. I’m sure these black catkin understand that. Their fear probably stems from the idea of raising a weapon and inflicting harm on another living being.*

The three black catkin positioned themselves around of a single collapsed

goblin. Each raised his weapon above his head and prepared to swing. Their faces were covered in sweat.

“Now swing!”

The three black catkin shut their eyes and brought their swords down. There was a clang as the swords bounced off the goblin’s armor. The goblin let out a painful screech. Hearing it caused the three black catkin to yelp and scramble back behind Fran.

*What the hell! That attack was so weak! Forget about cutting down goblins. Holy shit, you can’t even till the earth with that kind of swing. Their fear is really hampering their abilities.*

“Nn. Put hips into swing,” said Fran.

“B-But...”

“Again. Use hips. Like this,” she said, swinging me a few times.

“Yes ma’am...”

“Ugh...”

“I can’t do this! I can’t take it anymore.”

“You gotta do it man. Come on! Don’t leave us hanging.”

Overpowered by Fran’s forceful aura, the three of them once again stood in front of a goblin, raised their swords, and swung them down. This time, they followed through with their entire body and also they actually aimed for the head and other exposed parts. It took them a good thirty seconds, but they eventually managed to kill it.

“Haa...hahh...”

“How’s that?”

“Did we... do it...?”

“Nn. Good job. Goblin dead,” said Fran.

“Hell yeeaaaah!”

The three of them raised their hands and let out a cheer! They huddled together and started crying, their joy showing clearly on their faces.

Fran stepped in before they started getting out of hand.

“Bad. Getting cocky. Three attackers, one goblin. Still needed 10 swings,” she

pointed out. "And goblin immobile. Need one hit kill."

"Urk... Y-Yeah, I guess..."

"Yeah...she's right."

"Damn. We were getting carried away..."

"But not bad for first time," said Fran. "If train and choose skills, can be stronger than goblins."

"Yes ma'am!" the three shouted in unison.

*Fran's becoming a pretty good teacher. She's employing the carrot and the stick method very effectively, making the black catkin both fear and worship her.*

"Next three," said Fran.

"Y-Yes ma'am!"

The remaining black catkin all stepped up in groups of three and finished off one goblin each. Most of the later groups had already completed their mental preparations by the time they were called. They knew it was coming; they'd already watched their comrades perform the very same act. Few resisted as much as the first group. The black catkin began noisily chattering the moment the last goblin fell.

"The Black Lightning Princess says I gained a level!"

"Me too! Me too!"

"Aww... That's not fair! She let you hit its head! All I did was smack its feet."

"I'm gonna totally start training when I get back home!"

"You do that. I'm totally done with this. I can't handle any more."

Fran rounded up the villagers.

"Okay. No more monsters around. Returning to village," said Fran.

"Okay, but what about the corpses?"

"Will hold onto them for now."

Fran walked over and swiftly placed the corpses into my dimensional storage before turning around and leading the group back to the village.

## Chapter 286: A Banquet with the Black Catkin

The black catkin were fired up. They continued excitedly conversing with one another as we made our way back to the village. Content wise, their conversations were rather serious. They were earnestly trying to form parties and learn more about areas in which they could hunt evil beings. Schwarzekatze's surroundings were almost completely devoid of monsters, so their only choices were either to head towards the capital or set sail for Gilbard, the continent Fran and I had just come from.

*I'm glad they're motivated, but I'm also kind of worried. They'll probably die if they push themselves too hard right off the bat. We might've stirred them up a bit too much.*

*"Might be a good idea for you to hang around Schwartzekatze and train these guys up a bit."*

*"But then won't make to auction."*

Fran shook her head disapprovingly.

*"Yeah, I know, but I'm kinda worried they'll go out and just get themselves killed without actually getting anything done, y'know?"*

*"Can't stay. Need to keep promise."*

*"I'm not really sure if you can call what happened making a promise. I know Gallus left us a letter and whatnot, but we never sent him a reply. We technically didn't promise anyone anything."*

*"Still no."*

*"Well... if you say so."*

Fran firmly rejected my suggestion and left no room for negotiation. She could get surprisingly stubborn when it came to things like this. The young black catkin hated being wishy washy. She'd always stick to anything she decided on without so much as a second thought. There was no point in arguing with her, so I gave my metaphorical shoulders a shrug and laid off.

I wanted her to take care of the other black catkin, but I wasn't about to make her go back on her word. The strength of her resolve was one of the most

charming things about her, after all.

The black catkin that'd accompanied us in the assault began bragging about their exploits the moment we returned to the village. They talked about how they'd killed goblins, and how they'd witnessed Fran's heroic display of strength. Each and every single one of them had their voices filled with both pride and fervor. Even those that'd decided never to fight again spoke well of the encounter.

Witnessing the invigorated youth, the village's chief bowed to Fran.

"Thank you, Black Lightning Princess." His voice dripped with gratitude and delight.

"I can't thank you enough for what you've done."

"Not big deal." Fran shrugged.

"It is to us. Our tribe has finally gained the vigour and determination it lacked. None of this would have been possible without you. I *must* thank you for everything that you've done. You make us proud to be black catkin."

"Good," said Fran, with a nod.

She stopped for a moment to open up her dimensional storage and extract a portion of its contents. Specifically, she took out all the armour she'd just looted off the goblins.

"This, can leave here?"

All of it was made out of iron. As far as veterans were concerned, the stuff was useless. But it was still pretty damned good compared to what most fresh adventurers could get their hands on.

"Sorry, I don't quite follow. What do you mean?" The chief scratched the back of his head as he gazed at her with a clear look of confusion.

"Don't need."

"Y-You're offering to give it to us!? We couldn't possibly accept it. I'm sure it would make a fair amount of money if sold, so you'd best hold onto it."

"Not big deal. Have enough money."

"A-Are you sure? Can we really have all of it!?"

"Nn."

"T-Thank you so much! I'll make sure the villager's youngers put it to good use!"

“Nn. Good. Then this too.”

“Y-you’re giving us all that!?”

The chief’s eyes practically bulged out of his sockets as Fran dumped a bunch of the equipment we’d been keeping around in her storage. We’d looted it from the corpses of goblins, bandits, pirates, and everything else we’d killed on our journey. Most of it was busted up, but none of it was beyond repair. The leather stuff could just be stitched back together, whereas the metal stuff could be melted down and reforged.

The reason we hadn’t sold it any of it was because the guild only dealt in monster parts. Armour and the like needed to be taken to stores and merchants, and neither Fran nor I had really wanted to go through the trouble of selling it all.

“Don’t need this. Can’t be bothered to sell. Would be glad if you took.”

“Thank you! Thank you so much!”

The chief began tearing up. He’d interpreted Fran’s actions as generosity, and her words as a pretext.

*He seems really moved. It’s kind of a shame that Fran was actually telling the truth. She only decided to give him all that stuff because she was too lazy to sell it.*

\*\*\*

And so, the rest of the day passed by rather peacefully. That night, Schwartzekatze held a banquet. The town threw a huge party, all for the sake of welcoming Fran. Their land was infertile, so we didn’t really quite understand where they were getting the money or supplies to hold the event.

The chief informed us that he was planning to use up the village’s emergency rations. Of course, there was no way we could possibly allow that. We’d come to visit, not drain the village of its assets. We ended up supplying all the food instead. There was a lot of stuff in our storage. We had meat, vegetables, grains, eggs, and fish from all over the place.

At first, the black catkin had been hesitant to use our foodstuffs. In fact, they’d even tried to refuse, but Fran eventually forced them to comply by



explaining that she *really* needed to clean up the gigantic mess that was her inventory. She told them that she had so much food it would literally be impossible for her to ever finish it all, and that she needed Schwartzekatz's villagers to help her polish it off.

Again, the chief ended up choking back tears of joy. He'd thought of Fran as a sort of hero from the very start, but now, he'd begun seeing her as something even more than just that.

The chief's wife had actually taught us a recipe for a traditional black catkin stew. The taste was apparently kind of mediocre, but I still found it rather interesting because of the way it was made. It'd been cooked in an oddly shaped pot. The large vat was thick as a wall, and had the overall shape of a balance ball. Cooking in it had warmed up the entire room, likely due to something along the lines of the far infrared effect.

The meat and root vegetables that filled the pot softened extremely quickly. The village chief's wife had added two main seasonings: salt, and a fermented seasoning that kind of resembled soy sauce. She then just let the pot sit above an open fire and let it stew, occasionally stirring until it was thick and syrupy.

All in all, it turned out like something along the lines of a Japanese-styled stew. I decided to not only memorize the recipe, but also improve on it going forward so I could make Fran a tastier version of the soup that'd fed her people for generations.

The chief's wife had been curious about our recipes as well, so we taught her how to make stock, specifically from bones and vegetables.

She hadn't been the only one cooking up a storm. Many other villagers had joined in as well. There ended up being a whole ton of food, as one would expect from a banquet. All the villagers were super excited to see the sheer amount they had to eat.

They kicked off the banquet by practically worshipping Fran. Many of the black catkin danced as they sang the songs they would always repeat when faced with hardship.

At first, the atmosphere had almost been solemn. But as the hour passed, people started getting drunk. They cheered up and started getting all festive.

They drank together, sung out of tune songs, and danced in a jolly manner that starkly contrasted the reverent atmosphere the banquet had started with.

Though many were dead drunk, the villagers failed to forget their appreciation. They started crowding around Fran; everyone wanted to thank her at least once.

They all left the circle as soon as they spoke their words of appreciation but the number of people gathered around her didn't decrease in the slightest. In fact, more and more started lining up and crowding around her as the booze started getting to them.

*"You okay, Fran?"*

*"Nn. Fine."* She seemed happy.

Right, to her, this must be a dream come true. She's always wanted to evolve, both for her own sake, and for her tribe's.

The many black catkin continued to sing throughout the night with smiles on their faces. Fran stayed quiet, and her expression remained as usual, but I could tell that being the centre of attention had brought her joy.

*I really want to encourage Fran to hang around for a bit longer, but I know she won't change her mind. I've no doubt she'll tell me that she wants to leave in a few days. But you know what, it's fine. All that matters is that she enjoys the time she spends here.*

## Chapter 287: Ms. Fran's Magic Course

The banquet had evidently exhausted Fran quite a bit. She got out of bed a good bit later than usual the next day. There wasn't anything in particular for her to do, so she started wandering around the village after eating her fill.

Everyone Fran passed bowed to her. The action was a clear indication of their reverence. This respect was most obvious in the older folk, as many even took to their knees the moment they laid eyes on her.

*"It sure is quiet around here."*

"Nn. Just fields, nothing else."

Schwartzekatz was a farming village. The many black catkin that lived here spent their days tilling the fields. Only a select few were hunters; most of the village's meat came from peddlers and travelling merchants. And since the village was poor, it couldn't afford to buy much, so most of its members basically ended up being herbivores.

The younglings were especially thin and frail. Their frames were so lacking in meat that I was worried whether they would actually be capable of living on given how infertile the surrounding land was. It didn't look to me like they were capable of lasting.

Most of the older black catkin had lived through the previous Beastlord's reign. Though they were still cowardly, they'd known that they were going to be used as decoys and meatshields, so they'd at least built up their muscle mass and whatnot. They were unlike the youngsters, that'd known that they'd never need to step on the battlefield. That, combined with the fact that they thought they were weak, had totally robbed them of the will to strengthen themselves.

That was why they'd spent their lives slowly tilling away at the fields. And that was why they'd never learned ambition. None of them had ever considered trying to evolve prior to Fran's advent.

Those that did want to evolve needed to kill a thousand evil beings. But of course, that wasn't the only restriction, it was merely the one placed upon them as punishment. They still needed to hit level 45 before they could actually

awaken. And the way I saw it, none of the tribes members had possessed the conviction to go through that much combat.

Despite that, Fran wasn't worried, and for good reason. Unlike me, she'd known of the issue from the start. I was sure that she not only thought about it, but also came to the conclusion that it was impossible for the tribe's attitude to take a sudden 180. It seemed that she didn't expect any other black catkin to evolve within the next few years. It was possible that it'd even take several decades for one to fulfill all the necessary conditions.

"Want to do one thing."

*"What?"*

"Want to teach magic training method."

*"Makes sense."*

All one needed to do to evolve was kill a thousand evil beings and cap out their level. But all that would do was turn one into a Black Tigerkin. To become Black Heavenly Tigerkin, it was necessary to not only learn lightning magic, but also boost one's MGC and AGI stats. Grinding out stats wasn't too hard. All you had to do was work stat specific training segments into your routine, and you'd more or less be home free. Lightning magic, however, was much more difficult to obtain. Casting lightning magic required not just an affinity for the element, but also a high level in both fire and wind magic. It would be very unlikely for another Black Heavenly Tigerkin to pop up unless the Black Cat Tribe trained its younger members in the art of magecraft. Fran knew that leaving behind the techniques required for such an act would benefit her species greatly.

*"Yeah, I don't see why not. Go for it."*

Amanda had taught us everything we needed to know about magic-oriented training. I was confident we would be able to pass that knowledge on so long as we bundled it with a few hands-on examples. And so, Fran began to search for the village's chief. The village was fairly small, so it didn't take long for her to catch sight of him discussing something with a bunch of the tribe's younger members, a serious expression decorating his face all the while.

"Chief. Morning."

"Good morning, Black Lightning Princess."

“Something wrong?”

“Everything’s just fine, thank you. A few of the youngsters had said they wanted to start training, so they came to me for advice, and we were talking it through.”

The youngers in question were ones whose faces I recognized. They were members of the group that’d joined Fran on her goblin-slaying expedition.

“W-We want to get strong!” one said.

“I don’t know whether I’ll actually ever manage to evolve, but I want to try. I’m sick of just running away,” claimed another.

“As for me, I’d just like to get strong enough to at least protect myself and everyone else around me,” added a third.

*It looks like Fran really did succeed in influencing them.*

Hearing their opinions led my cat eared companion to contently nod before opening her mouth to speak.

“Got it. Good timing. Had idea.”

“I might be pushing our luck here, but are you perhaps willing to train them?” asked the chief.

“Kind of? Will teach how to learn magic.”

“How wonderful!”

The Black Cat Tribe as a whole had long forgotten the techniques required to awaken one’s magical talents. And because of that, its members thought that gaining the ability to cast magic would be akin to living a dream.

“I-Is it really possible for us to learn magic?” asked the chief.

“Probably. Not all will have affinity.”

“Yes, but some will, right?”

“Nn. Wind and fire probably common.”

Lightning magic was effectively the black cat tribe’s speciality, so it only made sense for many of their members to have an affinity for fire and wind.

“Anyone already can use magic?” asked Fran.

If such a person existed, then we could make the task easier on ourselves by turning them into the village’s mage instructor. Unfortunately, it seemed we’d

gotten our hopes up. The chief had responded by telling us that there was simply no way a village as rural as Schwartzekatz would be home to a magic caster. Mages were in high demand all over. There was no reason for anyone with that much talent to stay in an area surrounded by nothing but infertile land.

“Ok. Then gather villagers.”

“R-Right away! I’ll grab everyone available!”

“Wa—”

Fran tried to tell the chief that there wasn’t any issue in waiting until the villagers were done with the day’s work, but he ran off before she could.

It only took ten minutes for him to return. He’d ended up gathering almost 200 black catkin. They were gathered and seated around Fran, their eyes full of hope and anticipation. Every single last one of the villagers was present, save for those that absolutely couldn’t leave their posts.

“Will teach how to train magic,” said Fran, nonchalantly.

“Yes ma’am!” Most of the black catkin replied at once. Their voices thundered throughout the village at a volume I’d never imagined possible from a group as timid as they were.

“Fire first.”

And so, Fran’s lecture began. Its contents pretty much mirrored what Amanda had told her when she was just starting out. She told them to work with fire and flame on a daily basis, to stare at it, approach it, and even touch it while resolving oneself to be burnt. She explained to the tribe’s members that they needed to accustom themselves with fire to the extent of seeing it in their dreams if they wished to cast fire magic.

Hearing her explanation had caused the entire black cat tribe to go silent.

*I guess the training must’ve sounded too harsh and fanatical.*

The only one to speak was the chief.

“A-And doing that will allow us to learn how to cast fire magic?”

“Nn. If affinity.”

“Understood. I’ll prepare a place for our tribe’s members to train immediately.”

I’d thought that Fran would have to give a bit more insight into the theory for

the tribe's members to actually believe her, but I was wrong. They'd all easily been convinced. They didn't worry about whether or not they would actually be able to tolerate the training. Nor did they concern themselves with its effectiveness. They simply took in every word she said and believed her.

“Next, wind.”

Fran continued explaining everything away in her usual tone. The tribe was getting riled up despite the fact that she herself didn't sound particularly excited or enthusiastic. They continued listening to her until her lecture came to an end, their eyes filled with a fiery passion throughout.

## Chapter 288: Village Chief Fran...?

Many of Schwartzekatz's black catkin sat down by a fire or began fanning themselves the moment Fran's lecture came to an end. She'd not only taught them about the two elements needed for lightning magic, but also about water and earth magic as well. It seemed that the topics had piqued quite a bit of interest here and there, as a couple black catkin had started practicing the methods she'd mentioned for those two in particular. The vigour with which the villagers trained convinced me that at least one or two mages would end up popping up in due time. Or so I thought, until I'd come to a realization.

*"Wait, don't they need to get magic manipulation to actually cast stuff?"*

Amanda had told us that the magic manipulation skill was the key to learning magecraft, and I highly doubted that any of Schwartzekatz's villagers already had the skill. Simply interacting with the magical energy abundant in the natural environments around them wasn't nearly enough to actually teach them how to manipulate mana.

"Chief."

"Yes, what is it?"

"Nn. Stand here."

"Sure thing."

The village chief obediently listened to Fran's orders and stood himself up right in front of her while she raised a palm and began to focus.

"I-I'm feeling some sort of strange sensation. What's happening?"

"Nn. Using magic."

She tried seizing control of the chief's mana through the use of her magic manipulation skill. Much to her surprise, it'd worked out surprisingly well. She wasn't able to gain full control, but she at least managed to gain the ability to mess with it and stir it up.

"Feel?"

"I... can! I can't tell what it is, but I can feel something!"

"Nn. Magical energy."



“I see!”

*Huh, that’s a pretty solid idea.*

“Nn. Get everyone. Form line.”

“Right away!”

The chief ran around the town square and gathered all the villagers before Fran. It only took them an instant to form a pair of perfectly neat lines.

And so, both Fran and I got to work. We began manipulating the mana within each black catkin in turn in order to get them accustomed to the flow of mana. Neither of us really knew exactly how effective the action was, but we were convinced that it was at least better than leaving Schwartzekatz’s villagers completely unaware of what manipulating magical energy was supposed to feel like.

It took us a good bit to go through each and every black catkin, but neither of us particularly minded it. We didn’t really have anything else to do.

“Thank you very much,” said the chief.

“Not big deal.”

“It is, for us! You not only taught us that it truly was possible to evolve, but also mentored us in magecraft. We’re so grateful for your actions that we’ve no way to express it!”

A couple other black catkin chimed in and mentioned that what we’d just taught them would normally be considered top secret information as they nodded along in agreement.

Magic wasn’t the only thing the villagers were focused on. Some asked Fran questions about swordplay as well. There were quite the number of them, so Fran ended up hosting a second lecture not too long after she was done with the first, one focused on the more physical aspects of combat.

She taught them how to hold their blades, how to swing them, and what they needed to do to improve. The experience she’d gained from training her three apprentices had really shown. She managed to give effective, meaningful explanations despite still speaking in her usual taciturn manner.

The combination of the magic and swordplay lectures caused Fran’s

popularity to skyrocket and reach even greater heights. It seemed that all of Schwartzkatze adored her. I was pretty sure the chief would be totally willing to hand his position over to her should she ask for it.

Speaking of which, the chief ended up approaching Fran not too long after she finished answering most of her newfound students' questions.

"To be honest, I would love for you to take over as chief so that you could lead our villagers and teach them your ways."

*Holy shit, I called it.*

"Leaving in few days."

"I see..."

Unfortunately for the villagers, Fran refused. Disappointed expressions immediately appeared on all their faces.

"But will do best while still here."

"That sounds both wonderful and awe-inspiring. Thank you!"

The chief perked up and began to sing Fran praises the moment she voiced that she'd be willing to help.

*God damn, I really have to give it to Fran. She's gotta be one helluva bigshot to remain completely unaffected by the fact that they're all worshipping her and shit.*

Once Fran finished speaking to the chief, she began another training session centered around magic. But unlike the other two, the third training session failed to reach completion.

"C-Chief!"

"What is it?"

The red dogkin guard that'd accompanied us on the goblin hunt dashed into the town square. He was out of breath and panting as heavily as he could. A single glance was enough to tell that there was once again some sort of emergency.

"We've found another group of goblins!"

"What!? How many of them are there?"

“There’s only ten, but it isn’t normal for them to come around so often.”

“Hmmm... You’re right. That really is weird.”

*Wait what? Aren’t goblins supposed to be everywhere anyway? Like, I swear they’re fertile as all hell, so seeing them really shouldn’t come as much of a surprise, should it?*

Fran shared my opinion, so she asked the chief, only to learn that there’d never actually been many evil beings in Schwartzekatze’s vicinity to begin with.

Most of the youngsters that accompanied us yesterday had never even seen a goblin before. They were born and raised in Schwartzekatze, where it was, for the most part, peaceful and devoid of creatures hostile to the black cat tribe. Getting attacked two days in a row was so out of the ordinary that it meant that there was probably something wrong.

“There might be a nest nearby.”

“Hmmm... I hope that there isn’t going to be a stampede...Schwartzekatze will be in deep trouble if the goblins birth a king.”

“Yeah... We’ll need to find the nest as soon as possible.” The red dogkin grimaced.

If twenty goblins were already more than enough to plunge the village into despair, then an entire nest was sure to lead to its complete collapse. Or at least it would have, under normal circumstances. Fran was currently in town, and it was highly unlikely for any harm to come to the village so long as she was around. Schwartzekatze’s villagers were really lucky. They would’ve been screwed had the nest shown up any earlier or later.

“Chief. Will check surrounding area.”

“W-Will you really do that for us?”

“Nn. But can’t bring everyone along.”

“I understand. All we’d be good for is dead weight.”

The chief seemed to think that Fran would have a hard time protecting all the other black catkin mid-combat, but that wasn’t actually true. We’d long become strong enough to kill a hundred goblins in less than ten minutes, even while keeping everyone that came with us safe.

The reason we didn’t want to take all the other black catkin along was

because we needed to get around as quickly as possible if we wanted to find the goblin nest. Specifically, we were going to teleport. And since we needed to crush the goblin nest ASAP, we'd judged that it would be much more effective for us to go alone.

"New goblins, where?"

"T-They're hovering around the same place we found them last time."

"Got it. Don't let anyone leave village. Call people out looking back."

"Yes ma'am, I'll get that done immediately!"

*Wow. Fran's influence sure is coming in handy.*

The guard's obedience allowed us to focus on the matter at hand.

"Will leave now."

"Good luck on your hunt."

"Nn."

*I know he said good luck, but for some odd reason, I could've sworn it sounded kind of like "gob luck." I mean, we're hunting goblins, so I guess it kinda fits.*

"Alright, here's to hoping we find that goblin nest sooner than later."

## Chapter 289: The Goblin Nest

Dashing over to where the goblins had been spotted was the first thing Fran did after agreeing to exterminate them. She made sure to keep herself concealed throughout the journey so that she wouldn't spook her foes before she found them.

*"Master, how to find nest?"*

*"We'll probably have to either find their tracks or tail one of 'em."*

*"Got it."*

*"It might be best for us to split up. Urushi, you mind sticking around here and seeing if you can find anything?"*

*"Woof!"*

Urushi's nose was nothing short of impressive. I was willing to bet that he'd be able to find the goblin nest with his sense of smell alone so long as it was nearby.

*"As for us, Fran, we should probably start by hunting the goblins the guard spotted."*

*"Nn."*

*"Make sure you let a few live so that they can lead us back to their base."*

*"Got it."*

It didn't take long for us to find the goblins. They weren't too far from where we'd encountered the last group.

*"Strange."*

*"Yeah..."*

*"Taking break?"*

*"Doubt it..."*

It almost looked like the goblins were investigating the rocky area, which in and of itself, was already quite odd.

To make matters even more confusing was the fact that this group of goblins were just as well armed as the last. In fact, their equipment was pretty much

identical.

It was immediately clear to me that they were from the same nest as the last group. The only difference my appraisal skill informed me of was that the second group was even weaker than the first. The combination of their apparent weakness and their smaller numbers made me feel as if they were relatively low on the chain of command; they were probably just your everyday grunts.

*But that raises the question. Just how well off does a horde of goblins need to be to arm every single one of its lowly grunts with this kind of equipment? Like holy shit, they're goblins, not knights. God damn!*

*"It looks like they really might've birthed a king or something...No way they'd be this coordinated otherwise."*

*"Nn."*

*Okay, yeah, it looks like we're going to have to find that nest and obliterate it ASAP.*

*"Start with the leader. If we kill it, then the rest'll probably start running. We should probably let at least three of them live. There are ten of them, so I guess that means you can kill up to seven."*

*"Okay."*

*"Alright, let's do this!"*

*"Nn!"*

I teleported us behind the goblin that appeared to be in charge of the group. Fran swiftly dispatched both it and the one to its side in a single motion.

*"Gyaooo!"*

*"Gya gya!"*

*"Slow."*

The goblins realized that they were under attack and attempted to react, but they were unable to. Fran cut down another two while I roasted three with a fire spell.

All three of the remaining goblins began turning their heads and looking at their allies. Their eyes wandered back and forth between the cut up corpses

and the flame-broiled corpses before they finally realized that only they had survived our assault.

“Gyahiii!”

“Gyoeehhhh!”

“Hyahohiii!”

The goblins let loose what I assumed to be screams as they turned tail and began to flee. Naturally, we chose not to attack even though they’d made themselves totally vulnerable. We stealthily began to chase after them, ensuring that we remained hidden even while on the move.

None of the goblins so much as turned around as they sprinted forwards with everything they had. They were so terrified that they pissed their pants and shat themselves as they ran.

“Perfect,” said Fran.

*Those mother fucking goblins! How dare they show Fran something that god damn filthy!? I swear to God that I’m going to “disinfect” the shit out of them the moment they lead us back to their nest.*

The goblins couldn’t sense us, so it didn’t take too long for them to come to the conclusion that we were no longer pursuing them. They slowed themselves down to a fast walk. Though they thought they were safe, they were too terrified to stop, so they continued to advance as they fearfully gazed around.

They passed a waterskin between each other. The goblins took turns drinking from it as they interacted with each other. Their gestures were strangely human-like.

*Something about this whole scenario just feels... off. I remember chasing Goblins around back when I was still exploring the Demonic Wolf’s Plains. These goblins are stupid, but the ones I met back then were even dumber. They’d randomly start playing around and napping, as if they weren’t able to focus on anything for too long.*

“Master. There.”

“Is that their base? It looks like it.”

The nest we discovered looked like it contained somewhere in the realm of a

hundred goblins. I saw a couple goblin fighters and thieves mingled in with all the others.

*“There.”*

Fran directed my attention towards a specific part of the goblin base.

*“Shit, is that a goblin king!? God damn, the guards were right!”*

*Well, at least they’re not hiding away in some cave. Them being out in the open makes getting rid of them much more convenient.*

*“Huh, that’s weird. They’ve all got the exact same equipment.”*

*How the hell did that happen? Like, murdering a mercenary group or two isn’t nearly enough to arm an entire group of goblins with the exact same shit.*

*“Doesn’t matter if wipe out.”*

*“Yeah, true.”*

Fran had a point. King aside, all the goblins were just negligibly weak grunts.

The three we tailed immediately ran up to the king and began making a sort of report. I couldn’t understand their language, but I didn’t need to. I knew that they were making some sort of report concerning Fran regardless.

*“Well then. Looks like the goblin king’s got balls.”*

He immediately began rallying his troops once the three goblins had finished with their report. Based on his gestures, it seemed likely that the king intended to take the whole horde to Fran’s location.

*“We should probably cage them up so none of them get away.”*

*“Nn. Got it.”*

Fran and I both preceded by casting Thunder Wall, the spell that came with Lightning Magic’s second level. The two of us focused our magical energy to create five large walls. Specifically, Fran created two, and I created three. They came together to form a sort of pentagon, enclosing all the goblins within. The large panels of lightning suddenly popped up around the goblins. They were buzzing with electricity, and clearly had the ability to electrocute anything they touched.



“Gogogyaaaoooooh!?”

“Agyaga!”

*Wow, colour me impressed.*

The goblin king remained rational as he ordered a subordinate to attack the walls. A goblin soldier immediately complied and smashed his axe into the electric fence, only to receive a sudden shock and collapse on the spot. Though the soldier hadn't died, he had temporarily lost his ability to move.

We then pelted the goblins from the sky with all sorts of lightning magic. Only after they were all dead did we finally undo the cage.

*“Looks like we're done. I'mma go around absorbing all the cores.”*

“Nn.”

*“Most of their equipment got damaged by our magic, but I'm pretty sure some of it is at least still useable.”*

“Nn. Will put in storage.”

*“Yeah, might as well bring it back to the village.”*

Killing the goblins had granted Fran a significant amount of experience. It managed to push her over the threshold.

*“Grats! It looks like you've hit level 46.”*

“Nn!”

Fran's level cap had changed due to her evolution, but only now did we finally actually smash through her old cap. Breaking past level 45 really did imprint a powerful sense of progression. I couldn't wait to see Fran continue growing to the point where she would be able to overpower even the Beast Lord and everyone else on his level.

## Chapter 290: The Black Catkin Princess

We decided to give the area another quick check after defeating the goblins. Our goal was to check if there were any scouts or stragglers and hunt them down if there were.

Urushi joined Fran and aided in her search, but the three of us failed to uncover any clues even after an hour of investigation. We couldn't even find the nest the goblins had crawled out of. The result left me confused. Normally, goblins dug out massive shelters for their communities. Both the goblins Fran and I had worked together to defeat and the stupid ass goblins I'd destroyed back when I first came to this world had possessed huge nests. It didn't quite make sense for the group we just encountered to live out in the open.

*They couldn't have just migrated over from elsewhere, right? Nah, no way. There were way too many of them for that.*

As we found ourselves unable to find anything, we ultimately ended up returning to the village as is.

We did happen to see a monster called a Chicken Deer along the way, so we eliminated it and brought it along, so we technically didn't return completely empty handed. We at least picked up a half decent souvenir. The deer itself posed little challenge to us. It was extremely cowardly and attempted to turn tail and run the moment it spotted us, but it couldn't come anywhere close to keeping up with Urushi's speed, so he chased it down and ended it with ease.

The black catkin erupted into cheers as Fran arrived in Schwartzekatze. The flashy spells we cast were apparently so brilliant and showy that the villagers had seen them from within the walls.

"W-What power! Wow! That spell of yours was like a natural disaster in and of itself!"

"That's the Black Lightning Princess for you!"

"Yeah! She's so cool!"

They only became even more excited upon seeing her pull a chicken deer out from her storage.

“Woah! Holy shit dude, look at that! She even took out that deer monster all by herself!”

“Ermagawd!”

“I want to marry her!”

“Brought souvenir. For everyone. Eat.”

“I-Is that really okay!?” asked the chief.

“Nn.”

“T-Thank you so much!” The old man began bowing as he thanked her profusely. His voice was tinged with all sorts of emotion. Her actions had clearly moved him. He wasn’t the only one either, as many villagers began bowing and paying her their respects. Despite being a mere F ranked threat, the chicken deer was apparently one of the region’s toughest monsters. Seeing her bring one back had led the villagers to gaze upon her with renewed respect.

Because they were so fast and eager to run, their horns were actually worth a good bit. The black catkin would often salvage the horns off chicken deer that had naturally reached the end of their lives and sell them to supplement the village’s income.

“And this.”

“You’ve acquired more armour?” The chief’s eyes practically bulged out of their sockets. “And so much of it too!”

“Nn.”

A decent portion of the armour we dumped out had melted due to the intense heat of the electrical charges we’d sent pulsing through them, but a good bit of it could still be salvaged and put to use.

“Only this one barely burnt.”

“You’re right. It does seem quite special.”

The set of armour Fran was pointing at was the one worn by the goblin king. Being made of steel, it was a good bit stronger than everything else we gathered. None of the black catkin present were able to make good use of it as they were right now. It would be much better for the chief to hold onto it until the clan’s members grew more powerful. A thick stream of tears burst from the chief’s eyes as Fran explained her intentions.

“O-Of course! I’ll make sure it falls into the hands of someone worthy!”

\*\*\*

The second night, like the first, ended up as a banquet, albeit a much quieter one. The black catkin were all too focused on magecraft and martial prowess to do anything more than quietly speak amongst themselves.

Tonight’s main dish was the four meter tall deer Fran had hunted. It was large enough to provide every villager with a cut of meat.

“Here, have some of this.”

“Nn.”

“Try this out too.”

“Nom nom.”

“And don’t forget to have some tea!”

“Nn.”

Many of the female villagers were taking turns serving Fran. She was clearly the party’s guest of honour. They had not only cooked up a storm, but also brewed tea for her because she was too young for alcohol. The manner in which they were bringing Fran her food was reverent; it was almost as if they were handing her offerings.

“Is the dish to your taste, Princess?”

“What about this one? Would you like to try it, Princess?”

Halfway through the party, the black catkin stopped referring to Fran as the Black Lightning Princess. They’d instead just started referring to her as just “Princess.” As Fran didn’t particularly care either way, she didn’t stop them, so the habit soon spread throughout the village.

*Oh well, not like anything bad’s going to come out of it. Fran’s more than cute enough to be a princess, so if anything, I’d say the title suits her.*

I’d never actually met the beastkin country’s princess, but I was certain that Fran was cuter than her regardless.

“We can’t thank you enough for all the equipment you’ve graced us with, Princess,” said the village elder. Even he had given the nickname the green light. “Just dumped junk.”

“To us, your ‘junk’ is an entire mountain of treasure. Unfortunately, we don’t have a blacksmith present, but we’ll take it over to another nearby village and have everything repaired as soon as possible so we can distribute your gifts to the villagers.”

“No blacksmith here?”

“Unfortunately not. He passed away several years ago after being struck by a sudden illness.”

While he did have an apprentice, the apprentice was far too green to be worthwhile, so he temporarily moved to another village so he could learn from the blacksmith there. And because of that, Schwartzekatz was currently blacksmithless.

*I guess that means they’ll need to wait a good while before actually putting the stuff we gave them to use.*

“Master.”

“Sup?”

“Us, do something?”

“Hmmm...”

We’d stumbled across a rare chance for us to make use of the blacksmithing skill that we’d spent so many points on. Fran had never done anything past just maintaining me, so I was almost certain the opportunity would serve as good practice for her to brush up on her skills.

“Sure. I don’t see why not.”

\*\*\*

“And here we are. This is the smithy.”

“Nn.”

“Are you sure you don’t need any help?”

“Sure. Because secret techniques.”

“My apologies! I understand, I won’t pry any further!” said the chief, enthusiastically.

Fran nodded. She’d decided to get to work the moment the banquet came to a close, so she’d decided to spend the night in the home that belonged to the

former blacksmith. Looking inside, we confirmed that it had all the tools we needed.

“We’ve kept the place clean, but that’s it, so feel free to use it however you wish.”

“Thanks.”

“Princess, please! You’ve no need to thank us. In fact, we should be thanking you!”

We got to work as soon as the chief left. Since we had the blacksmithing skill, we were able to do everything we needed to, and quite easily at that. Our first task was converting everything irreparable back to ingots. We’d already finished sorting through everything before actually arriving. We’d handed everything that could be made usable after a bit of maintenance over to the villagers. They had already begun the mending process, so I was sure they’d have all sorts of usable gear in the near future.

All the stuff we brought with us either required a lot of work to fix, or was flat out beyond repair. And again, everything was already sorted. The plan was to melt down the stuff that was beyond repair and use it to fix the stuff that still had a bit of life left in it.

*“Alright, I’ll get to work. Feel free to sleep, Fran.”*

“No need.”

*“You sure? Well, works for me I guess. Let’s get started together then.”*

“Nn.”

And so, Fran and I worked the forge together until she started nodding off.

## Chapter 291: A Sword Makes Swords

I had telekinetically swung my hammer so many times throughout the night that its methodical, rhythmic ring had become almost natural for me to hear. I was so immersed in the tempo that I could immediately discern when any sound, hammer-related or not, was off beat. And it was for that exact reason that I was able to pick up on the fact that there was a bit of an odd knocking interfering with my sense of flow.

*“Hey Fran, could you get the door? It seems like we’ve got a visitor.”*  
“Nn.”

Luckily, Fran had already gotten out of bed. She was about as far from a morning person as could be, so she would have appeared half asleep if I had to wake her up to open the door. And if that happened, we would’ve been hard pressed to explain why the forge was running so smoothly even though she’d yet to fully awaken. We would’ve had no choice but to play it off as a case of sleepsmithing. You know, like sleepwalking, but with a forge.

“Who?”  
“Good morning Princess! It’s me, the village chief!”

Fran opened the door to find the man in charge of the village with his body already bent into a deep bow. He was holding a basket with a few pieces of bread poking out the top; he had come to deliver Fran her meal.

“I’ve brought you some breakfast. I hope it’s to your taste.”  
“Thanks.”  
“The pleasure is mine. Oh and are you holding up alright? It seems like you’ve been smithing all night.”

*Uh, whoops. Hopefully the forge didn’t keep anyone up all night.*

“Too loud? Sorry.”  
“Don’t you worry about it, milady! If anything, we’re grateful that you stayed up all night for us! We’re so blessed by your actions that we don’t even know how to express our thanks!”

We talked with the chief a bit and exchanged our schedules. We told him that we were going to be at the smithy for the rest of the day, whereas he informed us that most of the villagers would be practicing either their swordplay or magic. The older black catkin would begin cleaning up the equipment in the meantime.

“Don’t need to force to learn magic or swordplay.”

“Oh, no no no, we’re not forcing anyone, princess. Everyone’s just really eager to join in!”

It seemed that the whole village wished to cast magic. Everyone wanted to harness its mysterious power for themselves; the fact that they’d learned methods to acquire it had made them highly motivated.

*At this rate, black catkin mages are bound to pop up in no time.*

“I’ll be heading off now, but please let me know if you ever need anything.”

“Nn.”

We went back to focusing on our work as soon as the chief left. Specifically, I started to make blades out of the ingots I’d spent last night creating while Fran focused on fixing up shields and armour.

The best part about this world was that its skill system allowed me to gain knowledge seemingly out of nowhere.

Though I had never done any sort of smithing before, the maxed out blacksmithing skill I had taught me everything I needed to know about forging a blade. The most common way they were made nowadays was through casting. Molten metal would be poured into a mould and hammered into shape afterwards if need be.

I vaguely recalled something about most western-made swords being cast, whereas most Japanese swords were made in a forge. If I were to track these methods to their roots, I assumed that they likely only deviated due to the differences in resources and the knowledge of how one processed them. Of course, that was only a guess, as I had no real knowledge of how blacksmithing worked back in my world.

This world didn’t require those that wanted to use Japanese swords to go



through a complicated folding process. Blacksmiths could easily use magic-infused metals and magically enchanted tools to create sturdy Japanese-style blades through a typical casting process.

Magically infused metals were strong from the start. Hitting them with hammers while dousing them in magical fire would only enhance them even further. Thus, there was no need for one to go out of their way to fold a blade over a thousand times. Of course, one could go through a typical forging process if they wished, but that kind of treatment was reserved for high quality luxury goods. The common weapon had no need for such an intensive process.

Thus, I began by casting all the blades I wanted to make.

I combined parallel processing and telekinesis to cast, hammer, and polish different blades at the same time. I functioned as a one man factory and somehow managed to mass produce a whole slew of regular swords. Though I paid very little attention to each blade, my maxed out blacksmithing skill ensured that they were still of a decent quality.

But needless to say, none were good enough to surpass their maker. Of all the swords present, I was still by far the most powerful.

*“Alrighty, that’s a whole 50. Should be enough for now, I guess.”*

If one were to count the undamaged weapons that we’d looted, there were about 80 swords in total. All 80 were of a fairly standard make, so they weren’t too difficult for the black catkin to use even though they were all beginners.

I’d saved a few extra ingots so I could experiment and attempt to make a few weapons that packed a bit more of a punch. The first thing I wanted to try was to make a blade that was folded several times and forged from beginning to end.

I followed the steps my blacksmithing skill imprinted into my mind, heated up an ingot, and began hammering at it once it started glowing red. It took a while, but I eventually got the weapon to take the shape I wanted.

The skill was telling me that the product was complete, so I checked it over. All in all, it was surprisingly okay. It wasn’t terrible, but it wasn’t great either. It was just mediocre, which couldn’t really be helped given the material it was

crafted from. The biggest difference was that, unlike the blades I'd casted, it wasn't an Iron Sword, but rather a Low Grade Steel Sword.

It was the best thing I could make given my current materials and skills. Or at least it would be if I continued with my current, straightforward approach.

I decided to change things up a bit as I forged the next blade. The materials themselves were lackluster and couldn't actually hold that much magical energy, but the quality of the blade was still likely to improve if I packed it with as much as it could take. I made use of the bones of some of the monsters I'd planned to use for stock and burned them to ashes before mixing them into the metal. Though the monsters they came from were weak, they were still monsters nonetheless. Since the bones contained a bit of mana, I hypothesized that adding them would serve to increase the amount of mana the weapon could store.

Keyword: hypothesized. I had no clue if it would actually work out the way I was expecting.

*"Huh, it actually turned out better than I thought."*

It took even longer to make than the blade that I'd forged, but the end result was indeed a bit better than the last. The change in materials had actually ended up leading to my hammer's destruction, much to my surprise.

The third type of blade was a Low Grade Magic Steel Sword. Though I hadn't managed to get rid of the "Low Grade" tag, I'd at least managed to create magic steel. Though it was minuscule, I could indeed feel a bit of magical energy emanating off the blade. Its magical conductivity was also a good bit higher than all the others, as it sat at an F+ as opposed to an F or F-. In other words, the third type of blade had the potential to hit creatures with ethereal bodies. That said, it would likely take hundreds upon hundreds of swings to actually slay one given that the weapon had only the slightest bit of magical energy.

The stats of each type of weapon were as follows.

\*\*\*

Name: Iron Sword  
ATK: 88

MP: 0  
Durability: 300  
Magical Conductivity: F-  
Skills: None

\*\*\*

Name: Low Grade Steel Sword  
ATK: 114  
MP: 1  
Durability: 380  
Magical Conductivity: F  
Skills: None

\*\*\*

Name: Low Grade Magic Steel Sword  
ATK: 124  
MP: 10  
Durability: 390  
Magical Conductivity: F+  
Skills: None

\*\*\*

Given that, I decided to make all the remaining swords into Low Grade Magic Steel Swords.

And for comparison’s sake, Old Man Gallus’ swords had the tendency to look much more powerful. I recalled one of their stat pages as I worked.

\*\*\*

Name: High Grade Steel Longsword  
ATK: 398  
MP: 5  
Durability: 600  
Magical Conductivity: F  
Skills: None

\*\*\*

The thought reaffirmed the fact that Gallus was one hell of a smith.

Fran approached as I lost myself in thought. Her expression seemed somewhat distorted, and one of her hands was rested on her stomach.

“Master.”

“*What’s up?*”

“Hungry.”

“Woof...”

“*Oh crap, is it lunch time already?*”

I was so lost in thought that I’d totally forgotten that food was even a thing; it was long past noon.

“*My bad. I’ll make something real quick.*”

“Thanks.”

The reason the village chief hadn’t supplied lunch was because Schwartzekatz’s villagers didn’t eat it. To them, only having two meals a day was the norm despite the fact that most other beastkin had three. One could tell from that alone that the villagers were living in poverty.

*We should probably come back again some time after meeting Gallus. Preferably with lots of seeds and saplings in tow.*

“*In fact, I’ll even serve curry to make it up to you guys.*”

“Really?”

“Woof?”

“*Yup, and you can have as much of it as you want.*”

“In heaven.”

“*That’s an exaggeration if I’ve ever seen one.*”

“Curry heaven, I shall soon be upon thee. For I will now depart for the promised land,” said Fran. She was so happy that she recited something that sounded like a poem.

*Well, I’m glad she’s in a better mood, at least.*

The only problem was that our curry supply was actually starting to run a bit

low since we'd more or less served it en masse every time something happened. I was highly concerned that Fran's mood would plummet if we ran out.

"Tasty."

"Woof!"

And it went without saying that I would feel bad for Fran if she wasn't allowed to eat her favourite food. Fortunately, the place we were in now had a private kitchen in which I could work. Thus, I decided to spend the rest of my spare time making as much of it as I possibly could.

## Chapter 292: An Evening Centered Around Fran

Three nightly parties in a row seemed a bit too overwhelming, so we spoke to the village chief and asked him to refrain from organizing yet another banquet. Instead, Fran spent the night telling the villagers about her journey.

It all started because a few of the children, who'd finally grown accustomed to Fran, approached her and asked about her adventures. She promptly began spinning her tale, albeit in her usual way. She wasn't all that great at exaggerating things or spicing them up, so her stories ended up being much more realistic than they were heroic. But the villagers, both young and old, gathered around her nonetheless. All it took was a few moments for the whole village to rally to her side. She told them of the lich, described her exploits in Ulmutt's tournament, and then finally summed it all up by telling them what had happened on the ship.

"Then saved by Leviathan."

"Woahhh!"

"That's awesome!"

The entire village took a collective breath as she wrapped everything up. Every last member of its populace was so tense that they'd started sweating. But none had noticed until she was done. *That* was just how much attention they paid her.

"What happened next!?"

"I can't wait to hear more!"

"Mmph." Fran frowned. She had basically told the villagers all she was willing to, so she was at a loss as to what to say. After a moment of deliberating, she decided to talk a bit about mythology.

Specifically, she decided to talk about the reason the black catkin were unable to evolve, as she decided that there likely wasn't going to be any harm in telling her tribesmen about their curse.

"Hard to imagine now. But in past, black catkin high status."

The black catkin seemed to sense that Fran was about to dive into a whole

different type of topic, but they perked up their ears and listened with interest nonetheless. The more she said, however, the more their expressions changed. They slowly realized the gravity of the tale they were told, so they began to regard her lecture from a more serious standpoint.

Though they weren't quite at the level of being solemn, they stayed quiet. They made sure not to speak so they wouldn't miss a word. They learned that the Black Cat Tribe had, at one point, ruled over all the other beastkin as the Beast Lord, that their ruler had lost control after discovering a method to absorb the evil god's strength, and that divine punishment was the reason they'd lost the ability to evolve. Through Fran's words, they came to understand that their fetters existed for the sake of atonement. They needed to kill evil beings to make up for the sins committed by their ancestors.

"Nn. That's all."

This time, the black catkin stayed silent even after Fran finished speaking. They were having a hard time digesting all the information they'd just been fed.

The first to move was the chief.

"Thank you. Thank you so much for telling us about our past." He kneeled as he spoke to her.

"Nn."

"We must learn from this!" The chief turned towards the villagers as he raised his voice. "Listen, my kin! Our ancestors have committed a grave, deadly sin, one that we can't waste our time lamenting! We have to move forward while making up for all they've done to prove to the gods that lenience was the right decision! It may be tough, but the path of recompense is not without benefit, it is also the path that will lead our tribe to evolution. We can finally change! We no longer need to be weak kittens abandoned in the dark! We can stop aimlessly running around, living in solitude, and enduring unjust violence! We must follow our own paths! We must carve them with strength, dignity, and honour! We black catkin must become more powerful! We have to get strong enough to make up for our sins! I hereby declare that the village will support the effort no matter the cost! While I won't force you, I will encourage you to at least try! Let us all work towards redemption, together!"

*Damn dude, I can see why the village chief got his position. Really gotta give to him, he's good at getting people totally fired up.*

The whole village remained silent, but the residents' intentions were clear. Their eyes burned with the very same fiery passion the chief had just ignited in their hearts.

And it was for that reason that the silence only lasted an instant.

The whole village shook as a thunderous roar of sound blasted through it. Every single black catkin had stood up and started to clap.

*"I will evolve! I swear it on my name!"*

*"It's a shame. I'm far too old to try evolving myself, but that don't mean jack! I'll make sure I give you youngsters all the support I can!"*

*"And I'll use my skills to inscribe the princess' words in stone! I'll even make a monument and set it up in this very plaza!"*

Every last villager acknowledged and accepted at least some part of the chief's speech. Though not all of them decided that they themselves would seek evolution, they at least agreed to contribute to the effort, one way or another. The fact that they were both atoning and working towards their own personal goals at the same time served to drive the ball home.

*Wow. I really didn't think that they would believe us so easily. They're not mad at the gods either. That's a full set of expectations down the drain right there. I mean like, holy crap, talk about devout. They totally seem to think that it's their fault, and that there's nothing to blame the gods for. Though, I guess it does make sense seeing as how the gods here actually exist.*

The adults began celebrating the newfound policy by breaking out the alcohol. I didn't want Fran to drink, so I had her join the rest of the children for the time being.

*"I'm glad they believed us."*

*"Nn."*

*"It looks like the black cat tribe's full of kind-hearted, trusting people."* I wanted to follow up the statement by telling Fran that there was nothing wrong in making the choice to stay, to remain in Schwartzekatze, even if it was just for a little while longer—



“Leaving tomorrow.”

— But she cut me off before I could.

“Already?”

“Nn. Everything wanted to say already said.”

*“You sure you want to leave already? This is pretty sudden.”*

“Can’t stay. Too comfortable here. Need to leave.”

*“I mean, isn’t that all the more reason to—”*

“Decision final. Tomorrow.”

*Looks like there’s no convincing her.*

*“Alright. I guess we can always just come again some other time.”*

“Nn!”

*It’s not like Schwartzekatte is going to just up and disappear, after all.*

\*\*\*

Night fell, the party ended, and peace returned to the village. Like Schwartzekatte’s residents, Fran and Urushi were already sound asleep—or at least they had been. The two suddenly got up in tandem.

*Are we under attack!? Can’t be... I don’t sense anything, and Fran’s movements had a bit of lethargy to them, so I doubt it’s that...*

“What’s wrong?”

“Nn...?”

“Woof...?”

Neither of the two understood the reason they’d suddenly awoken. They couldn’t identify what they’d reacted to. They looked around and tried to find the source of the disturbance.

“Well?”

“Don’t know.”

“Ruff.”

But their conclusion was exactly the same as mine: nothing was out of the ordinary.

*The heck? Was there an earthquake somewhere or something? Er, wait, right,*

*earthquakes aren't as common here as they were back in Japan so everyone would probably be kicking up a much bigger fuss if there was one.*

We decided to take a look around the village just in case a monster had snuck in through the use of a stealth skill.

But again, we weren't able to find anything too far out of the ordinary. All we saw were plastered drunks passed out on the side of the road. We had no idea as to where each one lived, so we couldn't carry them all the way home, but we at least made sure to move them onto grass as opposed to just leaving them face first in dirt.

Though our search proved to be in vain, I highly doubted that there could be as big a coincidence as Fran and Urushi suddenly waking up at the same time for no real reason.

*"I know we haven't found anything yet, and that it's already late, but let's keep looking."*

"Nn."

## Chapter 293: An Incident To the North

Though we didn't discover anything no matter how hard we looked, neither Fran nor Urushi could quite calm down. Both the catkin and the wolf had better senses than me. I trusted their instincts and deduced that *something* had gone awry.

*"Whaddya say we try taking to the sky instead? Might be easier to figure out what's wrong that way."*

"Nn."

"Woof."

With Fran on his back, Urushi kicked off the ground and rapidly ascended. The three of us then used the artificial vantage point to examine our surroundings. Or at least we tried. The skies were overcast; clouds blocked out both the moons and the stars. It was far too dark for us to make out any significant detail.

*"Hmm..."*

"Don't see anything." Unlike me, Fran could see in the dark, so she was at least able to scour our surroundings.

*"What about you, Urushi?"*

"Whimper..."

For some odd reason, the wolf seemed adamant about tracking down the cause of his unease. Urushi continued to look around even though he was blinded by the night. He stayed on guard and even tried sniffing around, but he still couldn't find anything, as he had no idea what he was supposed to be sniffing for.

And that was when it happened. A single sliver of moonlight momentarily shot through the clouds and allowed me to catch sight of something.

*"Woah..."*

"Master?"

*"I think I just saw something move over there..."*

"Over where?"

*“Er, my bad. It was to the north.”*

It happened several kilometers away from us. At a glance, it looked to be somewhere near the most barren part of the forest. There wasn't anything obstructing my line of sight. I would've been able to see everything if it was still day, or if there weren't as many clouds. But alas, we had no choice but to work under the existing sub-optimal conditions.

The distance made it so not even Fran could see anything, despite having night vision.

*“Could you get us a bit closer, Urushi?”*

“Woof!”

Urushi sped through the sky. He moved us straight north with all the precision of a compass. The moon peeked through the clouds for another second about halfway through Urushi's journey.

“Master, saw?”

*“Yup, clear as day.”*

“Grrrrr...”

Though I only caught a glimpse of it, I was confident in what I just witnessed. A large group of monsters was slowly marching straight south. The group's scale was entirely blown out of proportion. It was far more than just a single nest or pack's worth. There were so many that the wasteland itself had been obscured from view. There were only monster, monsters, and more monsters as far as the eye could see. It was a veritable army.

I didn't know its final destination, but at this rate, it was going to collide with Schwartzekatze.

*“Shit! We need to get closer and make sure of what we saw!”*

“Woof!”

“What and why?”

*“I don't know, but either way, we've got one hell of a situation on our hands!”*

It took Urushi another five minutes to get right above the horde. We were now at close enough a distance for us to see them with the naked eye, even without the moon's aid. I didn't need to count to know that the army was at least ten thousand heads strong.

Their march was rigid and steady. It was clear that they were being controlled. I didn't know the extent to which the monsters were being manipulated, but at the very least, whoever was responsible for them had enough of a grasp on them to keep them silent as they moved.

"What now?"

*"It'd be pretty hard for us to take all these out with just us."*

"But villagers can't fight."

*"Yeah, I know. Honestly, something like this calls for an army, if anything."*

"Nn."

*"First things first, we need to get back to the village and have all the villagers evacuate."*

"Got it. First, preemptive strike?"

*"Let's not. There's too many of them. We can't check to see how strong each one is, and there might be something too strong for us to handle mixed in with all the trash mobs."*

We would end up having to run if there really was anything that strong. The only place to retreat to is the village, and leading a strong monster there would be a disaster and a half in and of itself.

*"I know you want to fight, but we should probably wait until we've at least emptied out Schwartzekatz first."*

"Got it."

*"Alright Urushi, head back to the village! Full speed ahead!"*

*"Woof!"*

"Hurry!" added Fran.

*"Woof woof!"*

Our first stop was the chief's house. Urushi barked and howled to grab his attention as we approached.

"Chief! Open! Now!" Fran jumped off Urushi's back and began knocking on the door the moment he landed.

"W-What is the matter, Princess?" The wolf had succeeded in waking him, so he answered the door immediately, rubbing his tired eyes as he did.

"Emergency!"

“W-What kind of emergency...?”

“Horde of monsters. Headed for village.”

“W-What!? Enough for even you to be this panicked, milady!?”

“Nn. In wasteland right now. Huge group. Need army.”

“W-What!? They’re just to the north!? I’ll go wake up the guards right away!”

“Evacuation. Need to start soon.”

“Understood, milady!”

“What’s all the noise, chief?” A few of the black catkin, awoken by Urushi’s voice, joined us right before the chief set off, so he immediately roped them in and got them to help. The process went far more painlessly than it would have anywhere else. All the black catkin trusted Fran, so they immediately believed the warning the moment they heard that she was its source.

“Listen well! The Princess has found a huge army of monsters marching right for us! There are so many of them that they fill the entire wasteland!”

“What?”

“S-Seriously...? What the heck!?” A couple catkin began to panic, but the chief stopped them before they totally lost their minds.

“Stay calm, don’t lose your cool! They’re close, but they’re not on our gates just yet. We’ve got enough time to organise an evacuation so long as everyone does their part! Wake everyone up and have them get ready to leave! Split up so you can wake everyone up as quickly as possible.”

“G-Got it!”

“Sure thing, chief!”

“Thank you. I’ll go wake the guards in the meantime.”

The black catkin moved quickly. According to them, they were quite used to this. Running away was the one thing they excelled at.

Many lived as wanderers before settling down in Schwartzekatze. They polished their ability to escape by running from the monsters and bandits they encountered on their travels. In fact, evacuation drills were apparently a part of everyday life in Schwartzekatze. They’d hold training roughly once a year.

“Where are we supposed to evacuate to?” One black catkin voiced.

This time, however, was a bit different. Normally, evacuation was simple

because all the black catkin had to do was find another nearby village. But this time, they didn't really know where to go. Schwartzekatz was among the sturdiest of the villages in its vicinity. No nearby settlement had walls large enough to withstand over ten thousand monsters.

"We'll probably need to head to Greengoat," answered the chief.

The villagers were good at escaping, but that didn't mean they could outpace monsters. They needed to get all their stuff ready to go right away so they could get as early a head start as possible. But still, many doubted they would be able to make it all the way.

The chief's reply to their concerns was calm and rational. "It doesn't matter, we've got to make sure the information propagates. We'll have to scatter and send people all over. We'll both warn the other nearby villages and have our people head to Greengoat to tell the army what's happened."

"Nn," agreed Fran.

Though the battle had yet to start, it had already devolved into a race against the clock.

## Chapter 294: Revisiting Greengoat

“A-Are you sure!?”

“Did you just say an entire army!?” A pair of panicked guards asked the equally flustered chief to confirm his claim the moment they heard it.

“You heard what I said! The Princess saw it herself!”

“Look, I know what you’re trying to say, but we can’t just...” As they were soldiers and not black catkin, the men in charge of the city’s defense didn’t trust Fran’s testimony nearly as readily as everyone else, but the chief talked them down and convinced them that there was a need for concern.

“Enough of that! Just hurry! You need to get to both Greengoat and all the surrounding villages and let them know the news!”

“Sir, please understand. We just have to make sure of it first. We can’t just be going around reporting whatever we hear.”

*Yeah, this isn’t working. Looks like we’ll have to step in a bit.*

“Is truth. Don’t believe?”

“That’s not really what I’m trying to say here...”

“Will handle responsibility. Hurry. Move.”

Fran activated her Intimidation skill as she spoke to the guards. For the record, she wasn’t threatening them. She was simply making them understand their place in the metaphorical food chain. As beastkin, the guards respected those that were stronger than them, so she was only doing the most natural thing and putting on a show of her strength to emphasize that they should listen to her.

“I-I understand.” And surely enough, they were immediately rendered obedient.

“We’ll get on it right away. In fact, I’ll head out right this instant.”

“Will go to Greengoat myself,” said Fran.

“W-will you really?” asked a guard.

“Nn. Faster that way. Will leave you responsible for evacuation. Nearby villages.”



“Yes Ma’am! We’ll make sure it gets done.” The chief was so full of energy that he promptly responded in the guards’ places.

“Then going now. Urushi.”

“Woof!”

We already knew exactly where Greengoat was relative to our current location, so we soared through the sky and made a beeline straight for it. We had to get Urushi to push himself a bit beyond what would’ve otherwise been his limits to get there in a timely manner, but it was well worth it. We managed to cut the journey, which had taken us over four hours the first time around, to less than a quarter of that; sixtyish minutes was all it took for the Urushi Express to transport us to Greengoat.

A part of me had been tempted to just have our wolf companion ferry us right to the governor’s doorstep, but I ultimately decided against it. *Dropping in uninvited is a terrible idea. We’d have a lot of explaining to do and not enough time to carry any of it through.*

With no other choice, we suppressed our fiery emotions and stopped by Greengoat’s gate.

We didn’t bother making Urushi shrink. He approached the gate with us while in his larger form. Naturally, having a massive wolf close in on one of the city’s entrances in the middle of the night sent the guards into panic mode, but it really couldn’t be helped. It was an emergency. We needed every last second we could get.

“I’m Black Lightning Princess. Need to talk to governor. Emergency. Let through now.”

“S-Sure, I’ll get right on it!”

*He’s doing a pretty good job of keeping his cool, but I’m totally convinced that he’s in full blown panic mode on the inside right now. This whole scenario’s hella blown out of proportion. Like, this dude was casually going about doing his night patrol, only to suddenly have a giant ass wolf drop in front of him. If I was him, I would’ve been expecting to die. And that’s not even it. Next thing he knows, he sees a pretty girl riding it, only to find out that she’s the Black Lightning Princess. And that she has business with someone way high up the chain of command. If*

*this scenario isn't nerve racking, then I don't know what is. Must suck real hard to be him right now.*

His surprise was clear. The man was so shocked, in fact, that he readily agreed to our request without so much as asking a question. He simply nodded as he opened the gate in a hurry.

"Thanks."

As today was a bit of a special case, Fran didn't dismount Urushi. She rode him through town and had him fly above the buildings it was comprised of. The wolf flew straight as an arrow and made it to the lord's house, the manor that lay at the town's centre, in a mere matter of moments.

"W-what!? A wolf!?" shouted one of the guards. His partner made a similar remark.

"This. Governor's house?"

"Huh? Wait, might you be the the Black Lightning Princess herself?" The bolder man stepped forward and began to speak with Fran.

"Nn. So? This, governor's house?"

"Y-Yes ma'am! That it is!"

"Need to meet him. Urgent."

"P-Please wait just a second. I'll have someone let him know immediately!"

"In a hurry. Will enter myself if takes more than ten minutes." Knowing that Fran was dead serious, the man went pale. He immediately had the other guard get a move on. Unlike his partner, he remained to keep an eye on Fran, but I wasn't sure if he really was up to the job. It looked like he'd been scared stiff.

"C-Could you please tell me a bit more about this urgent matter of yours?"

He was intimidated to the point of stuttering, but he managed to do his job nonetheless.

"Will tell governor."

"A-Alright, I understand." The guard knew not to stick his nose into the confidential, so he promptly dropped the topic.

"This city, has knights?"

"We do. There's an order serving directly under the governor's command."

*Good to hear. I'd imagine that this country's knights would be pretty damn*

*strong.*

The guard's partner returned right as we were about to ask him about the number of knights present. *Woah, that was quick. It only took him like five minutes.*

"O-Our lord says that he will meet with you immediately! Follow me!"  
"Nn."

I was expecting the guard to lead us to an audience chamber, but he instead brought us to a smaller building placed not too far from the manor's entrance, one apparently built to receive guests of a more noble background.

The lord, Marmanno, was already awaiting us within. His bulky, muscle laden frame lay exposed under his thin, translucent nightshirt. The sight of him in what was basically a negligee contrasted his muscular image to such an extent that I likely would've laughed uncontrollably had we not been caught up in an emergency.

"Welcome, Black Lightning Princess. I've not seen you around these parts for a whole four odd days."

"Nn. Thanks for agreeing to meeting."

"It's no big deal. Any request of yours that I am able to complete is a request I'm willing to at least consider. And meeting with you, even at this hour, is nothing particularly troubling. Personally, I would've preferred if I was to be properly dressed, but I decided not to waste your time after hearing that you only came at the behest of an urgent matter."

*So he only decided to meet with Fran right away because of who she was? Damn, that reputation of hers sure has been coming in handy lately.*

"Not problem. Looks good on you."

"Your words are too kind. But anyway, enough pleasantries. I'm sure you wish to get right down to business. What's this urgent matter that the guards have been telling me about? Did you perhaps find out more about the assassins?"

"Not that."

"Hmm... I'm out of ideas then. I can't say I'm capable of imagining anything else too realistic."

"North. Whole army of monsters approaching."

“Did you just say an entire army?”

“Nn. In wasteland north of Schwartzekatz. Headed south.”

“How many of them are there?”

“Nn...” Fran tilted her head to the side as she tried to figure out how to convey her thoughts. “Enough to fill entire wasteland.”

“T-The entire wasteland...!?” Marmanno’s eyes went wide. “Surely this is not something you’re speaking in jest, is it?”

“Not jest. Truth. Swear on my life.”

*“T-That’s going a bit too far, Fran!”*

*Holy shit, talk about going overboard.*

*“Is truth, so not problem.”*

*“You’ve got a point, but that’s not what I’m trying to get at here. Don’t ever say that you’re going to swear anything on your life ever again, alright?”*

“Nn? ...Okay?” She didn’t quite seem to understand what I was saying, but she trusted me, so she agreed nonetheless.

“Is it a stampede...?” The governor began muttering his thoughts on the matter as I convinced Fran to place more value on her life. “No, that can’t be right. The area has no dungeons.”

Marmanno’s doubts were justified. I understood exactly where he was coming from. He was Greengoa’s lord, so there was no way he wouldn’t have known if there were any dungeons nearby, even if they’d only existed in the past. It wouldn’t make sense for the invasion to be the cause of a newly spawned dungeon either. Fresh dungeons didn’t have the means to produce tens of thousands of troops.

“Any other things in north?”

“I cannot think of too much worth mention. There is the Kingdom of Eldia to the northeast and Bashar to the northwest. However, the uncharted mountain range to the north functions as a natural barrier. I doubt either country’s troops could cross it.”

According to Marmanno, the only creatures that lived in the mountains were monsters that had adapted to it. Its climate was far too harsh for humans and beastkin to withstand. It was for that reason that the country deployed very few

troops to the north.

*Wait, but then... Just where the hell did all those monsters come from?  
Hmmm. Oh, wait, right. That's not important right now. We need to figure out  
how we're actually going to deal with all the monsters first.*

"Need army."

"..."

Marmanno frowned and scrunched up his brows. The look on his face was one of dismay.

"I am very sorry, but the army cannot be immediately deployed."

The words that left his mouth were the exact opposite of the ones that we'd hoped for.

## Chapter 295: Of Soldiers and War

“I am very sorry, but the army cannot be immediately deployed.” Marmanno spoke in a strained tone. He wanted to help and almost seemed mortified at the fact that he couldn’t.

“Why?”

“The Basharian army engaged our own near our country’s southwestern border only three days prior.”

*Damn it. I guess that means they got their hands full.*

“More than half of Greengoat’s soldiers have been dispatched to serve on the war front.”

“But still some here?”

“The forces we have remaining are just shy of what’s needed to match an army of ten thousand monsters.” Marmanno cast his gaze downward and frowned.

“I’m sorry. All I can do is pray that the villagers are able to escape and make it all the way here, to Greengoat. This city’s walls are the only ones sturdy enough to ward off a literal army of monsters, and I will be needing my troops to defend the city when the time comes. I can’t afford to have them march. That’d be no different from telling them to cast their lives aside.”

*Oh, I get it. He’s thinking about letting the monsters siege the city since he doesn’t have enough troops to face them head on, and he can’t exactly keep turtling without the numbers to fight the damned things off.*

“Any earth mages? Can make big wall to stall.”

“The only man in this country capable of making a wall big enough to stop an entire army has already taken his place on the Basharian front. I doubt we’d be able to get him to respond to our calls.”

“Okay.”

“But at the very least, I’ll get in touch with all the other governors immediately and check to see if they have any troops to spare. I’ll confer with the army as well, just in case.”

“How much time to arrive?”

“A few days at the very least...” Marmanno frowned. “We’ll have to wait till they’re here to march. We can’t have our troops losing their lives and exhausting themselves before we’ve amassed our forces.”

*I understand that Marmanno’s not throwing his troops at the army right away because it’d be a huge waste of lives, but I can’t really bring myself to accept the notion of abandoning all the villages. I know it’s ultimately a choice that’ll save more lives, but he’s practically just leaving them to burn. Not that I’m trying to blame him or anything. As a governor, his choices made sense. Each village only has a few hundred people at best. Numerically speaking, it makes much more sense to focus on protecting the tens of thousands that live here in Greengoat. I had nothing to say. There was no fault in his logic.*

Fran also understood the lord’s grievances, so she immediately stood up and got ready to leave.

“Got it.”

“T-Thanks for understanding.” He heaved a sigh of relief. “Where are you headed now?”

“Finished business here. Next, Adventurers’ Guild.”

“W-What do you think of spending a few more days in Greengoat?” Marmanno would benefit greatly from having Fran remain. The widespread knowledge of her might made her mere presence enough to relieve the townsfolk of their concerns and boost the soldiers’ morale, not to mention that she would be able to contribute drastically to the city’s fighting force. There was no doubt that she would strengthen its defenses.

“No. Will not abandon my tribe.” Fran turned to him and spoke with purpose, blunt and concise as always. It was ironic. The two were effectively working towards the same goal: protecting their people. And Fran’s tone reflected just that. There was no malice in her voice, only conviction.

Marmanno, however, failed to catch her drift. He seemed to think that her ironic statement was meant as a critique of his policy. The goatkin promptly got to his feet as his expression twisted in frustration.

*Oh shit. He’s pissed.* Or so I thought.

“I’m... sorry.” Contrary to my expectations, Marmanno wasn’t actually angry.

He was frustrated, but not irritated by Fran's actions.

"As a man and a warrior myself, I respect your decision. I would do the very same if I was in your shoes. Saving those in need is none other than my creed, the pillar atop which my pride rests. But as lord of this land, I cannot act."

Rather, he was vexed by his own inability to take to the field and save all that he could.

"Nn."

"Please, Black Lightning Princess, go in my stead. Save the villagers to whom I'm unable to extend my hand!"

The goatkin's body quivered with emotion as he bent his hips forward and bowed as deeply as he could.

"Got it."

"Thank you. I can't possibly express just how much this means to me."

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Fran charged out of Marmanno's mansion and made a beeline straight for the guild. Greengoat was as large as one would expect of a city in which several major trade routes converged, so it took her a good bit to make it all the way over.

"Hellooooo?" Fran called out as she entered the guild to get as quick a response as she could.

"Good evening, Black Lightning Princess. How many I help you?"

"Emergency. Need to talk to Guildmaster. Let me meet right now."

"Yes ma'am." Again, Fran's reputation came in handy. She managed to get the receptionist to do exactly as she wanted with no questions asked whatsoever. She disappeared for about three minutes to get permission before returning and leading Fran to her destination: The guildmaster's room.

The man we ended up being shown to was an old mage with a long, white beard. Like Fran, he had evolved. He was pretty damned strong.

"What brings you here today, Black Lightning Princess?"

"North. Army of monsters incoming."

"Come again?" The old mage's eyes went wide.



Fran immediately filled him in on the details. He first reacted to her query with shock, but soon got ahold of himself.

“You say that this army contains over ten thousand members?”

“Want adventurers to help.”

“Of course. I don’t see any reason for them not to, but...” The guildmaster as he pressed a fist against his chin.

“Problem?”

“We lack our usual numbers. About half of our adventurers have already gone south.”

“Adventurers joining war too?”

*Wait a second. Aren’t adventurers supposed to be exempt from conscription? I could’ve sworn I saw something like that in the rules back when we first joined up.*

After a moment of pondering, I soon recalled that adventurers were often people that didn’t wish to be tied down to any particular state. They travelled all over and often operated outside their country of origin. Thus, they lacked patriotism. Most didn’t want to be pulled into international conflicts. *I’m pretty sure there’d be far fewer adventurers affiliated with the guild if they didn’t have the anti-conscription clause in place.*

In fact, the guild had signed many an international treaty that guaranteed its members freedom from conscription. The guild was responsible for taking care of bandits and monsters, but that was it. Of course, like all treaties, the guild’s contract was not respected by all. The Reidosians had blatantly ignored it and conscripted adventurers in the past. All those that attempted to defy them were deported and banned from the country. And yet, despite their underhanded douchebaggery, the Reidosians were still completely and utterly defeated. The Reidosian Adventurers’ Guild was shut down, and the country itself was rendered almost completely devoid of the profession’s practitioners, even to this day.

The Reidosians were both the first and the last to ever attempt conscripting adventurers. *Countries still do try forming contracts with specific adventurers with clauses that mention cases pertaining to war, but that’s pretty much it these days. The only people who accept those contracts are people who are*

*passionate about the countries they live in, like Amanda and Jean.*

Consent had become the key word—forcibly recruiting adventurers was just a flat out no go.

“All of those who went did so of their own accord.” The guildmaster smiled. “This country is made by Beastkin, for Beastkin. The knights and soldiers that serve in the military are not the only ones that wish to protect it.”

*Ohhh. Right. I forgot. This country’s a bit special. The Beast Lord used to be an adventurer, didn’t he? I guess his policies must really support people that share his background in that case. Huh. I think I can see why so many of this country’s adventurers are willing to fight.*

“So we’re short on hands. I doubt you’d be able to get enough people to fight off an entire army, even if we went around recruiting from all the nearby towns.”

“Want as much help as can get.”

“Got it. But do keep in mind that it’s possible we might not be able to gather more than just what’s needed to keep Greengoat defended.”

“Nn...” Fran frowned, but nodded regardless. “Got it.”

“Will you fight to your last?”

The guildmaster cast his gaze on Fran as she got to her feet. His eyes seemed to be telling her that he wanted to say it was better for her not to go, but a single glance at her face silenced him. He knew. He knew her people lay to the north. And from her eyes alone, he’d determined her stance.

“Bye.” Choosing not to answer, Fran left his question unanswered.

“Farewell. May the tides of battle surge in your favour.”